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FOR MAIMIE'S SAKE.

FOR MAIMIE'S SAKE

A Tale of Love and Dynamite

BY

GRANT ALLEN

AUTHOR OF 'BABYLON,' 'PHILISTIA,' 'STRANGE STORIES,' ETC.

London

CHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY

1886

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FOR MAIMIE'S SAKE.

CHAPTER I.

ENTER MAIMIE.

JOCELYN CIPRIANI lay sunning himself idly on his back on the shelving shingle beach at King's Silbury. It was a beautiful cloudless August day, and Jocelyn Cipriani did not belie his Italian ancestry in his basking love of bright sunshine or of the placid idleness so dear to the souls of Southern Europeans.

'What a glorious morning, Hetty!' he said, with an upward glance at his pretty little wife, sitting close beside him with her library novel. 'And what creatures you women really are, too! Fancy your holding up a parasol to shade you on a day like to-day, now! Why, it seems to me, the whole point of the seaside in summer is just this—that it's the only place in England where the sun ever manages to shine for three whole hours uninterruptedly together.'

And he went on flinging pebbles into the unruffled sea just beyond the steep bank of shingle where the tide halted, without even so much as lifting his head to see where they fell with ever-widening circles on the calm surface of the glistening water.

Hetty looked up from her book for a minute at the glassy bay and the long sweep of circling hills beyond it, and then murmured, with a half-sigh of regret, as she scanned the pretty picture hastily with her eyes:

'I often wish, do you know, Jocelyn, that you painted

landscape instead of figure! How nice it would be for you, now, to be always working at a place like this, instead of in your own great heavy studio in nasty, dirty, smoky old London.'

Jocelyn twisted himself a fresh cigarette in his white fingers with quick inherited Southern dexterity.

'No, no, Hetty,' he answered, stroking his pointed brown Vandyke beard; 'landscape is not the line for the man who would make his name famous on the first roll of art, I tell you, little woman. Landscape is all well enough in its way, to be sure, for the small men of the second order—for Wilkins, and Smart, and MacTavish, and O'Grady; but the human figure, the human face divine, the human emotions and passions and aspirations, those are the stock-in-trade and the raw material of the great geniuses who move the centuries; in every art—in every art, Hetty. If a man were to watch the birds, and the flowers, and the trees, and the rivers, all his life long, do you think he'd make as great a writer in the end as Shakespeare, or Goethe, or Æschylus, or Cervantes? Not a bit of it; he never could do it. Man is the head and crown of all things; and the artist in whatever material, who wishes to reach the summit of his art, must take man for the foundation and the basis of his special handicraft.'

And he blew out two or three short white puffs from his tiny cigarette with the easy air of a person very well satisfied with himself, his wife, the rest of the human race, the constitution of things, and the universe generally.

There was a short silence for a few minutes, during which Jocelyn continued to smoke meditatively and throw pebbles at intervals with a splash into the sea, while Hetty went on uninterruptedly with the perusal of her old and much-thumbed novel. By-and-by Jocelyn roused himself with sudden energy, and cried out eagerly:

'There she is! There she is again, Hetty! Now this time I'm quite determined you shall really see her.'

'Who?' Hetty asked, looking up from her book for a second with languid interest.

'Who? Why, *her*,' Jocelyn answered, regardless of prim grammatical niceties. 'The pretty girl, you know, Hetty—

that is to say, the rather pretty girl, who would be really pretty if she weren't quite so fresh and plump and rosy. She lacks the fashionable pre-Raffaelite morbidity. Burne Jones would consider her disgustingly healthy. The wise man, you see, little woman, never calls any other girl pretty to his own wife without at least adding some saving clause in the shape of a but or a qualification. He abstains from unmixed and unqualified approval of alien loveliness.'

'Then you can't be a wise man, I'm sure, Jocelyn, for you're always raving to me about the extraordinary beauty of this wonderful girl of yours. Let me see her. Which is she? Oh, that one over there in the print dress with the roses on it! Well, yes, if you insist upon it, she's certainly pretty—very pretty, I must admit, Jocelyn.'

'Would be,' Jocelyn corrected gravely, 'were it not for those inevitable redundancies or deficiencies which are always to be observed in all other women, save and except you only, Hetty.'

And he pinched the lobe of her ear teasingly between his delicate thumb and finger.

'I wish I could get to know that girl, somehow,' the painter went on reflectively, after a moment's pause.

'Why?' the pretty little wife asked, with a careless glance across at the bright young figure he had pointed out to her.

'Why, I should immensely like her to sit to me, Hetty, for a picture I've had more or less in my mind ever since I came here: a picture that's been growing up bodily before me, and that she's just the exact model, of all girls in the world, to realize its perfection. It's Guido falling in love with Beatrice Cenci as she lies in prison. That girl's got the very face for a Beatrice. I'd give fifty pounds to get her to sit for it to me, I tell you.'

'Probably the fifty pounds would be quite superfluous,' Hetty answered, smiling. 'As a rule, young girls in a country place are only too glad to let anyone paint them. They take it as a graceful compliment to their personal appearance. I remember when I first knew you myself, Jocelyn, I should have been awfully flattered if you'd offered to paint me.'

'You're not so much flattered by it nowadays, Hetty. You've got too used to ringing the changes on Juliet, Olivia, and the Roman Empresses. And, besides, it's such a bore, I know, sitting stuck up there stiff, as the wife of Caractacus, in the dull old studio. But this is going to be such a splendid picture, I tell you, little woman—a perfect masterpiece, an afflatus, an inspiration, a thing to make Comyns Carr's mouth water. See here; it's to be just like this, look you. Guido there, grave and solemn, with a beautiful countenance: Sydney Chevenix shall sit for Guido. There's a face for you—Sydney Chevenix's—just imagine him with a tinge of first love upon those clear-cut features; we must manage to make him fall in love off-hand with somebody or other just on purpose. He sits so'—pencil and paper out at once, artist fashion, and a few stray lines made to do duty sketchily for a rough idea of the imaginary picture—'brush in hand like this, and such a splendid expression of dawning love suggested in the very pose of his neck and shoulders. Then Beatrice—here she is, you see, innocent, smiling, unconscious, guileless, never even aware in her spotless soul of her coming execution; too childlike to realize it; an infantile Beatrice, all in gold and yellow—you catch the composition! Isn't that grand now?'

And as he spoke, he sketched in lightly the face and figure of his ideal Beatrice from the girl who stood, parasol in hand, unconscious of his notice, waiting carelessly by a wooden bench on the little rustic parade behind them.

A beautiful creature she was, undeniably—small or of medium height, but full and mature in bust and figure, though still very childish of face and expression; a ripe girl of twenty, with such exquisitely dainty and delicate softness of baby-like outline that only an artist of rare power could ever have hit off aright the melting contours of her innocent little mouth and features. She was decidedly plump, yet not too plump; and the scarcely visible dimples upon her cheeks and chin, which deepened when she smiled, redeemed the plumpness from the very faintest suspicion of coarseness or excess. Her complexion was perfect, a pearly pinky-white, like the inside of a shell,

on the ground-work of her face, relieved by just as much blush-rose as was quite becoming in the centre of either cheek and on the full red lips that nestled between them. By no means a poetical or ethereal creature certainly, but a winning, sweet, flesh-and-blood woman, so beautiful that Hetty herself—susceptible, like an artist's wife, to the charms of beauty—fell in love with her almost immediately on first sight, as truly as her husband had done before her.

'Jocelyn,' she said, regarding the unconscious girl with intense interest, 'you must really get to know her somehow or other. I should like you to paint her. You're quite right—she'd make a lovely picture; and, besides, I want to make her acquaintance on my own account. She's just the sort of girl I should like to be friendly with. We haven't got enough young girl friends now; they all go off and marry the wrong men, somehow, the silly creatures! I wish they'd only have the good sense always to let me choose their husbands for them.'

'Judging by your own distinguished success in that department,' Jocelyn replied, with a slight twinkle in his eye, 'I should say they couldn't possibly put the selection into better hands than yours, Hetty. However, we shall get to know the pretty girl in good time; and I shall paint her, and you shall make friends with her, and we shall both join wits to select a suitable husband for her. So, having settled that important point to our own entire satisfaction, let's proceed to discover practically who she is and where she comes from.'

As the painter spoke, an old fisherman, with his hands in his pockets, passed in front of the girl, and, with a respectful nod of friendly recognition, asked in a loud, seafaring voice:

'Want a boat this morning, miss? Lovely day for a row. Glad to take you out for a bit on the water, if so be you'd be so kind as to let me. Beautiful weather! beautiful weather!'

The pretty girl nodded back to him, and answered, with a peculiarly sunny smile:

'Thank you, Sam: it's awfully kind of you. I should like it immensely, if I could spare the time; but I don't

want to go out sailing this morning, thanks. The fact is, I'm waiting for somebody.'

The old sailor touched his hat with respectful kindliness, and strolled along the beach in a careless fashion, saying as he went:

'No offence meant, miss; thought you might a' liked it. God bless her dear pretty little face! She's a good un, she is. Everybody do love her.'

'Who is the young lady?' Hetty ventured to ask curiously, as the man passed just in front of her.

The sailor looked sideways somewhat grumpily, and answered, without turning his head:

'Why, bless you, that's Miss Maimie, that young lady is. Everybody at Silbury do know Miss Maimie. God bless her pretty little face!'

'Surnames don't pass current in these parts, it seems,' Jocelyn Cipriani said, smiling. 'You're no nearer what you want to get at now than you ever were, I fancy, Hetty.'

At that exact moment, a handsome man of thirty-five or thereabouts, in a light tweed suit, and a straw hat with a college ribbon on it, strolled up carelessly from the hotel on the Parade towards the pretty girl, and began to talk to her in a listless fashion for a few minutes. As he approached, the pretty girl's face coloured up at once, till it looked more exquisitely beautiful than ever, with a certain unmistakable glow of feminine satisfaction; and her parasol ceased immediately from describing its vague circles on the dusty ground in a way that told Jocelyn Cipriani's practised eye, without possibility of error, the person she was waiting for had really arrived.

'Why, Mr. Pym knows her!' Hetty cried in surprise, as the man in the tweed suit lifted his hat gracefully to the pretty stranger.

'Mr. Pym knows her,' Jocelyn Cipriani repeated carelessly; 'and what's more, Hetty, the pretty girl's in love with Pym, too.'

'How do you know?' Hetty asked quickly.

'Oh, you don't take a painter in about these small matters, I can tell you, little woman. It's my trade, you

know; my shop, my business. If I wasn't always watching and noting these minute shades of passing expression in men and women, I could never paint the sort of things I do now, Hetty. The pretty girl's in love with Pym, I'll bet you a sovereign.'

'Well, that's a good thing, anyhow, I'm sure, Jocelyn; for now we shall probably get to know her.'

'That's a good thing as far as it goes, no doubt, for us, Hetty; but——'

'But what?'

'Well, I don't know whether it's quite such a good thing for the pretty girl, you see, somehow.'

'Why, Jocelyn, surely Mr. Pym's a very nice man, and a fellow and tutor of an Oxford college. I should think he was an excellent match for almost anybody—below the rank of a baronet's daughter.'

'An excellent match, indeed—within the limits you mention—if only she can catch him. But they *do* say, Hetty—well, I forget the long and the short of it in all the details; but I remember, when Pym and I were at Oriel together, there was some story or other about a barmaid; and though for the life of me I can't recollect it now, I've an impression—a vague impression, the merest impression—I may be mistaken—I speak, like the French newspapers, under all reserves—that Pym didn't come altogether well out of it with flying colours. Indeed, I won't swear that he ever even got out of it at all in any way worth speaking of. The pretty girl had better take care. Flirting is a game where the man stakes nothing, and the woman everything. If the pretty girl's wise, she'll be very cautious how she flirts with such a man as Adrian Pym without full inquiry.'

'Pretty girls never are wise,' Hetty answered, pulling lazily at the flower of a horned sea-poppy; 'and if they were, you know, you men wouldn't like them half as well as you do at present, Jocelyn. Intellect in a woman is absolutely fatal. But here's Mr. Pym coming over to us, I declare; now we shall learn all about who the pretty girl is.'

The man in the tweed suit strolled across the road towards them in the regular Oxford lounging manner.

'Good-morning, Cipriani,' he said, as he raised his straw hat with careless gracefulness to Hetty. 'Lovely day, isn't it, Mrs. Cipriani? Jocelyn was making a sketch just now, I think, wasn't he? Not going to take to landscape at your time of life, are you, Cipriani?'

'No,' the painter answered, 'not if I can help it; though Hetty here has just been telling me I ought to go in for it; and I am well known to be the most obedient and submissive of husbands. But it wasn't landscape I was twiddling my pencil at; I was putting your pretty little friend there into an imaginary picture—my Academy picture for next year, in fact—and I thought she'd make a charming Beatrice. There's the sketch, if you care to look at it; a mere outline—three strokes of a pencil; yet I dare say you'd recognise her, even if you don't recognise the remarkable merit of a very neat and dexterous study.'

Adrian Pym took the little scrap of paper from the painter's hand with an awkward and constrained air, as if he didn't quite like the particular turn the conversation had taken.

'Yes,' he answered, with some slight hesitation, 'it *is* like her; undoubtedly like her. You've hit her off very well at first sight, my dear fellow.'

'How very beautiful she is, Mr. Pym!' Hetty cried enthusiastically. 'I've quite fallen in love with her the moment I've seen her. As to Jocelyn, he's watched her up and down several times before, here; and he always calls her categorically "the pretty girl," just as if there were no other pretty girls anywhere else in all creation.'

'Which is an obvious fallacy,' Jocelyn interrupted gravely, with a mock bow towards his pretty little wife's neat small figure.

'Well, she *is* pretty, certainly,' Adrian Pym assented, with that grudging acquiescence under which a man in love always vainly tries to hide the marks of his profoundest admiration; 'she *is* pretty, Mrs. Cipriani, and I'm not at all astonished that Jocelyn and you should have been so much struck by her. She's the prettiest girl in all Silbury.'

'We're not the only ones to be struck, Adrian,' the painter said significantly. 'But you needn't blush about

it. Bigger places than Silbury might well be proud of her. You've hit upon a very good thing, and deserve to be congratulated upon your good fortune. Tell us who she is, and all about her. I want to get her for myself, you know —professionally, I mean—no idea of turning Mahommedan, my dear Hetty—to sit for me, that is to say, in my new picture that I'm now painting—internally, in imagination.'

'Well,' Adrian Pym answered slowly, with some reluctance, 'her name's Maimie, and she's a sort of second cousin or so of one of my pupils. I've brought a reading-party down here, you know, for several years running now, and Maimie and I are old chums by this time; quite a long-standing friendship, in fact, Mrs. Cipriani.'

'But hasn't she got any other name besides Maimie?' Hetty inquired, with a smile of quiet amusement. 'People don't generally go about the world nowadays like Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and so on, with only one name tacked on to their personality, and that one a pet name into the bargain.'

The Oxford tutor blushed almost imperceptibly.

'It isn't a pet name, indeed,' he said, with apologetic promptness. 'She's got no other, except her surname. She was christened Maimie, I believe—Maimie only. Nobody ever calls her anything but Maimie; she's Miss Maimie alone, even to the fisher-people. Or, rather, she wasn't ever christened at all, if it comes to that: for her father's eccentric—very eccentric; an old naval officer with ideas of his own, compounded, I believe, from Tom Paine and the Admiralty Sailing Directions; and he would never allow her to undergo any form of religious ceremony, except repeating some prayer he composed himself to the Spirit of Reason or some similar abstraction. He has a rabid objection to the clergy—the black brigade and the devil-dodgers, he calls them; and the sight of a white tie looming in the distance drives him positively frantic for ten minutes. He's quite a character, the old captain is.'

'No doubt,' Jocelyn answered mercilessly; 'but, for a teacher of logic, Pym, you betray a most reprehensible inability to stick close to the point at issue. You will perhaps remember that we asked you for particulars—not

about Maimie's papa or Maimie's mamma, or Maimie's uncles and aunts and cousins, but about the actual and individual Maimie herself *in propriâ personâ*. You admit incidentally that the young lady is seized of a surname—I hope I speak with legal accuracy: what is it?'

'Oh, her surname?' Adrian Pym replied, with some show of awkward confusion. 'Her surname? Maimie's surname? Well, her surname, I believe, Jocelyn—her surname's Llewellyn.'

'Oh, you believe so, Mr. Pym?' Hetty echoed maliciously.

Adrian Pym looked positively embarrassed.

'Yes, I believe so,' he answered, seating himself cross-legged on the shingle beside them. 'In fact, I know it. I've known Maimie now for several years—ever since she was only as high as that, Mrs. Cipriani!'

'How very nice!' Hetty put in, banteringly. 'It's well to begin an acquaintance with a pretty girl early in life. She learns then betimes not to be afraid of you.'

The tutor took no notice of her meaning look, but preferred to turn aside with a faint blush to her husband, and said rather shortly:

'I can introduce you to her if you'd really like to know her, Cipriani.'

'Thanks: do. It would exactly suit me. I must make her come up to London and stop with us, and let me immortalize her face in my Academy picture—such a picture, Adrian! The very finest I've ever painted. I mean to make a perfect masterpiece of it. In after-years, Hetty, when the pretty girl's a wrinkled old woman, people will point her out, like the Maid of Athens or Goethe's Bettina, and say, "That's the person who sat to Jocelyn Cipriani, the celebrated painter, for his great picture of Beatrice Cenci."'

'You conceited man!' Hetty cried, laughing.

'Not at all,' Adrian Pym answered, with friendly warmth. 'When an artist has painted the things that Jocelyn has done, it would be sheer affectation, and worse, on his part to pretend he didn't know himself how much the world thinks of them and values them. But why can't you paint Maimie down here, as she is—eh, Cipriani!'

'My dear fellow! And lose my holiday! No, no, Pym; that would never do, I tell you. Your pretty Arcadian must come up to London and be painted in a drear-nighted December by London gas-light, to give the full effect, you know, of Italian sunshine. For Italy, nothing in England, I declare, equal to fog and gaslight. Does she live here? Is she a native—she and her pagan papa—or are they only visitors?'

'A native,' Adrian Pym answered lightly. 'Never been anywhere in her life, almost, away from Silbury. In fact, she's lived a sort of Paul et Virginie existence, don't you know—with the part of Paul left out, of course.' (Hetty coughed drily.) 'Her father, old Captain Llewellyn, is quite a madman in his own way—a Welsh Druid, I believe, or something of the kind—a disbeliever in everything on earth, except the Triads and the Triumph of Reason; and he's brought Maimie up in primæval innocence—an amiable heathen—not even allowing her to read the Bible. He's a dear, wild, well-meaning, insane old man; and he has his own ideas about education and so forth. He's taught Maimie to shoot and fence, to read and write, and to tell the truth, he says, like the Persians in Herodotus; and he's not taught her anything else in particular, except to ride barebacked, and play cricket like a boy, and row a boat as well as a sailor.'

'But isn't she a dreadful tomboy, with such a queer education?' Hetty asked curiously. 'She looks such a gentle, timid, womanly little thing, one would never think she'd been brought up in such a shocking heathenish fashion.'

'So she is,' Adrian Pym answered, with unguarded warmth. 'As gentle a little thing as ever was born, I assure you, Mrs. Cipriani. She's too womanly altogether by nature ever to have been much altered even by her father's funny teaching. He has only kept her from learning the conventional nonsense most other women learn, so that she says what she thinks, innocent little soul, and means no harm by it; but he hasn't succeeded in making her into anything but a real woman, as childish and simple as ever you could find one. She reminds me always of something between

Galatea and Miranda—a child in innocence, and yet a perfect woman in maturity of feeling.'

Jocelyn Cipriani yawned.

'How very enthusiastic we're getting, Pym,' he answered lazily. 'We must certainly be introduced to this child of nature, this prodigy of ingenuousness. What a perfect Beatrice she ought to make, if only she comes up to the highly coloured description, Hetty! But when a man has reached Pym's unfortunate condition, I've often observed that his opinions at large are apt to be painfully warped and distorted by the emotional medium, which seems, like Iceland spar, to exercise a double refractive rainbow-making influence. I understand they call the state "falling in love," Adrian.'

Adrian Pym drew himself up upon the shingle a little stiffly.

'The fellow of a college,' he answered, with some chilliness in his tone, 'has no opportunities for indulging himself in such expensive luxuries. It's all very well for artists like you, Cipriani, who can coin money with the wave of a paint-brush; but as for me, you know, my dear fellow, my income depends absolutely and entirely upon my strict observance of the most monastic celibacy.'

CHAPTER II.

FIRST LOVE.

THAT same afternoon, shortly after lunch, Adrian Pym left his noisy party of ten undergraduates, and turned by himself to climb the heather-clad hill that overhangs the west side of King's Silbury.

Near the top of the cliff path, in a little combe, where a seat stood back a yard or two from the edge, he came suddenly upon Maimie Llewellyn.

It was clear that Maimie was not there by accident. She jumped up as he came, like one who expects another, and took his hand in hers with childish frankness.

'So there you are, Adrian,' she said in a soft clear voice, exquisitely pure and musical and delicate. 'I've been

waiting for you here for half an hour. I really thought you were never coming.'

Adrian Pym smiled a quiet smile of half-cynical amusement, not unmixed with the selfish pleasure of conscious appreciation.

'How delightfully natural young people are!' he said, relaxing her hand that seemed loth to leave his. 'I'm punctual to the minute, Maimie—punctual to the minute; whence the acute arithmetician might obviously infer that you had come here full half an hour too early. The eagerness of youth outruns its discretion. Such devotion is beyond all praise: I feel I have done nothing to deserve it.'

'Now, don't begin talking that way, Adrian,' Maimie cried, with half a pout, 'or else I shall really go down back into the village and take a walk with one of the undergraduates. You ought to be very much flattered indeed by my coming so early, sir, and not to make fun of me over my head, as you're so fond of doing.'

'I *am* very much flattered,' Adrian answered more seriously, looking with unspoken admiration at the pretty little figure in its neat-fitting, flowered, print dress; 'and as to making fun of you, Maimie, nothing on earth could possibly be further from my intentions. You know there's nobody whose society gives me half so much pleasure as yours, little baby-face; and I wouldn't even seem to be rude to you for all the universe.' (Maimie's cheeks flushed up at once with ingenuous pleasure.) 'And do you know, you've made a new conquest to-day, too? You saw those two artistically dressed people I was talking to on the beach just after I arranged to meet you here this afternoon, didn't you?'

'What! that sweet little woman with the blue-green frock and the lace parasol? Oh, yes, I've noticed her on the beach for ever so long. She looks a dear: and her husband's so handsome!'

'He is,' Adrian Pym answered slowly, 'undeniably handsome; and he and she want to know you, Maimie. Shall I tell you who it is? It's Jocelyn Cipriani.'

'Cipriani!' Maimie repeated in a vague voice. 'Cipriani—Cipriani. Oh, then, of course they must be Italians.'

'My dear child! Italians! *O sancta simplicitas!* Well,

really, do you mean to tell me, Maimie, you've never heard of Jocelyn Cipriani, the R.A., and the greatest rising painter at this moment in all England?'

'No,' Maimie anwered sturdily, 'I never heard of him; and what's more, I'm not ashamed to say so. I dare say there are plenty of other girls in England—who've been to school, too—and who've never heard of Mr. Cipriani.'

'But, my dearest Maimie, you really are too distressingly ignorant. Remember, now, the other day, you told me you didn't know anything about King Solomon.'

'You didn't say "King Solomon,"' Maimie replied, smiling. 'You said "Solomon," all short, just so, and I said I thought he must be a Jew old-clothes man; and you laughed at me and made horrid fun of me, like a wretch that you are, because I didn't know about him. I've half a mind to give up coming out to meet you altogether, if you always go on trying to set me examination papers in history and geography. I hate being examined; and you've got so accustomed to it up at Oxford, you know, that you carry it away with you even into the country.'

Adrian winced. The unsophisticated Silbury girl had hit the Oxford tutor unconsciously on the most vulnerable point in his entire economy. There's nothing your university don hates so much as the imputation of pedantry or priggishness.

'You're too cruel, Maimie,' he said, showing his two even rows of white teeth in a forced smile; 'and you fence like a practised hand, too, meeting thrust with counter-thrust, and not like a mere woman. Well, this is all the return I get, it seems, for trying to tell you how you've enslaved (as usual) two more susceptible human hearts. They came, saw, and were promptly conquered. Jocelyn Cipriani, you know, or rather you don't know, is the most marvellous younger English painter now living. He's the leader of the new idealistic school, and he paints something like a Japanese, something like a madman, and something like an angel. Nobody ever painted like him before except the early Italian masters, who imitated him badly beforehand without half his idealism. At this moment Jocelyn Cipriani is the most admired and best abused and most

hotly debated artist in all London. The world divides itself, in fact, into Ciprianistes and anti-Ciprianistes. And Jocelyn Cipriani has fallen at first sight in love with you.'

'How very nice of him!' Maimie answered unaffectedly. 'I like that. But he's got a pretty little wife of his own already, you said, didn't you?'

'He has,' Adrian Pym asserted with a nod. 'And when I said he'd fallen in love with you, I merely intended to suggest in the most proper fashion that he'd done so professionally, and not personally. He wants to get to know you, I mean, so as to paint you in his great Italian picture of which he's now working up the composition.'

'That's very nice, too,' Maimie answered, as they walked along towards the bosky heather patches away from the path; 'but not quite so nice, of course, as if he'd fallen in love with me the other way—the real way, you know, Adrian.'

'Why, you insatiable, extraordinary, unblushing little woman!' Adrian Pym cried, seizing her hand and pressing it spasmodically with a hard squeeze; 'haven't you got *me* to fall in love with you, and isn't that quite enough at a time for any one well-conducted young person?'

'No,' Maimie replied quite demurely. 'I like everybody nice, of course, to love me. I think it's nicest to be loved by everybody. I've always been accustomed, you know, all my life long to papa, and the fishermen, and the women in the village, and the school-children, and the Oxford men, and everybody loving me.'

'But, my dear child, you know there's a difference! Was there ever anybody so absolutely innocent and simple-minded as you are, Maimie? You talk of the fishermen, and the women, and the children, and the Oxford men all in one breath, as if it was exactly the same thing which of them all happened to love you.'

'Oh no!' Maimie cried warmly; 'I don t mean that, you know. I like some of them, of course, much better than the others. I like being loved by the Oxford men most; and best of all I love being loved by you, Adrian.'

And she took his hand tenderly in hers, with a simplicity

of demeanour that robbed the act at once of all apparent imputation of forwardness.

Adrian let himself be fondled passively for a moment in a half-shame faced, undecided fashion, and then threw himself down on a little oasis of short grass among the purple heather, where the tall gorse and overarching brambles that spread about completely hid them from all passing observers. Maimie seated herself quietly beside him, and began to pull to pieces with idle fingers the petals of a wild Scotch rose that flowered unseen among the ring of brushwood.

'So this Mr. Cipriani wants to paint my picture some day, does he?' she asked again, after a minute's silence, turning her big brown eyes straight upon Adrian. 'That's very nice of him, really, isn't it? I should love to be painted. It would be so delightful to have everybody coming to admire one's portrait. You must introduce me to him, Adrian.'

'I will,' Adrian answered, lying flat upon the grass, and leaning on his elbows, with his face pushed close up beside Maimie's. 'He says he'll immortalize your great big eyes in his greatest picture.'

'What a horrid conceited man he must be if he said that seriously! But oh, isn't he awfully handsome, Adrian! Such lovely brown eyes of his own, and such a beautiful artistic-looking beard! I was watching both of them all the time while I was waiting on the Parade for a word with you this morning.'

'You seem to be quite smitten with him,' Adrian retorted, half pettishly.

'Of course I am,' Maimie replied, with perfect sincerity. 'I always am smitten by those lovely artistic pointed beards, you know. Why don't you wear a pointed beard like his yourself, Adrian, instead of a skimpy bit of a moustache like that only?'

Adrian twirled the point of that justly criticized article between his finger and thumb with tender solicitude. '*Non omnia possumus omnes*, Maimie,' he answered, smiling benignly. 'That's Latin, you know, and I say it on purpose because I'm sure you won't understand it. It always tan-

talizes girls to talk Latin to them, and I like tantalizing you, you wicked little thing, for you look so bewitching always when you're trying your hardest to find out anything. On the whole, my child, I think you, taking you all round, one way with another, about the very nicest girl I've ever come across in all my experience.'

'So you've often told me before,' Maimie said, smiling her sunny childlike smile at him; 'but, like the farmer with the claret, we never seem to get any forrader, Adrian.'

The Oxford tutor gave an embarrassed smile, and played nervously with the Roman coin that dangled from his watch-chain.

'You're painfully young, Maimie,' he said presently. 'Painfully young and delightfully unsophisticated. And yet your very innocence sometimes leads you much where the most advanced forwardness would lead any other and more experienced woman. I'm almost old enough to be your father. I'm fifteen years older than you are, Maimie. You ought to have taken up instead with one of the undergraduates.'

'I hate undergraduates,' Maimie cried out vehemently. 'At least—that is to say, I don't hate them; I like them very well in their proper place and in their own way—when there's nobody else to talk to and to flirt with, you know, dear; but they're not fit to hold a candle to you, Adrian. Great giggling, blushing, hesitating, overgrown schoolboys—that's what I call them; frightened at every second word they say to one, and always afraid they're putting their foot in it. I like middle-aged men best; middle-aged men know their own minds, and aren't perpetually afraid of their lives they're going to say something that will shock or offend you. . . . And I like *you* best of all, Adrian.'

'And I've already told you, Maimie, that I reciprocate the feeling with compound interest. There, just one kiss, little one, there's nobody coming. Now . . . so. . . . Yes, that's right. Thank you, darling. Maimie, Maimie, you're really too delicious! No more—no more at present. We mustn't discount the whole balance. That's enough at a time; stand away, Maimie.'

Maimie threw herself back upon the grass with unconscious grace, and shut her eyes dreamily for a minute.

'This is lovely—lovely, isn't it, Adrian?' she said in a gloating far-away fashion. 'I love coming out and sitting here on the cliff alone with you. I think it's the very loveliest thing I ever did in all my lifetime.'

'Happy girl!' Adrian said, somewhat bitterly. 'What endless degrees and vistas of pleasure you have yet before you! You've only just for the first time crossed the outermost threshold, and you have still many, many stages to pass before you first begin to find out how very hollow it all is at bottom. Keep your illusions, Maimie — keep your illusions! Why, you even succeed in bringing back some of mine to me. We are still fools at thirty-five! We still believe that happiness is possible—in the future—in the future. Undeterred by fifteen years of ripe experience and continuous disappointment, we still expect we may love a woman and be happy with her for ever. This conclusively proves, you see, what egregious idiots we are in spite of everything. *Quod erat demonstrandum.*'

'If you're going to begin talking that sort of nonsense again,' Maimie said decisively, 'I shall get up this very minute, without waiting to say good-bye to you, and go back to Silbury to the undergraduates. Undergraduates have at least one good point: they never talk either Latin grammar or stupid cynicism to one.'

Adrian opened his eyes quite suddenly, as if recalled to himself by her words, and said, in a new and very different tone:

'Cipriani would like you to go to London some day, and let him paint you.'

'To London!' Maimie cried, clasping her hands in ecstasy. 'That would be too delightful! That would be just heavenly! How very nice of him! I should love to go there. But papa—papa would never let me! And that dear, pretty little Mrs. Cipriani, too! She's just a darling. Oh, I should immensely love to go and stop a month with Mrs. Cipriani!'

'I've no doubt,' Adrian said quietly, 'Captain Llewellyn's objections could be easily set aside. We could tell him, for

example, that Cipriani had a special and peculiar aversion to all devil-dodgers, and was general secretary of a charitable society for the total abolition of parish churches.'

'How does he come to have such a name as Cipriani?' Maimie inquired quickly.

'Because, like all the rest of us,' Adrian answered, with an imperceptible curl of his lip, 'he inherited his surname from his father's family.'

'But who was his father, you horrid creature? and how ever did his father come to be called so?'

'By a similar process of inheritance from his grandfather and his remoter progenitors, I should be inclined to conjecture.'

'Adrian, Adrian, you nasty, rude, sneering man! I don't like you a bit! I hate you! I detest you! You know very well what I meant to ask! How do they come to be Italians in England? People with names like Cipriani aren't to be found every day of the week knocking up and down all over the face of the country everywhere.'

'I beg your pardon,' Adrian interrupted gravely; 'you forget the organ-grinders.'

'Good-bye, Mr. Pym,' Maimie said, rising as if in anger. 'I hope to meet you again next year at Oxford.'

'Maimie, Maimie!' the tutor cried, pulling her hastily down again, and seizing the opportunity to kiss her soundly two or three times over in the process; 'you mustn't go away yet! I'm enjoying myself so immensely; and so are you too, you bad little thing, though you won't admit it. Don't waste your time; most people waste theirs as profusely as if they had half-a-dozen lives to live together. I love teasing you, and you love being teased; and so why shouldn't we both get our full fun out of it? Life is surely not so rich in enjoyments that we can afford to throw away any single source of one. Sit down again, there's a dear little woman, and you shall hear whatever you want to hear about the Ciprianis, or anybody else on earth you choose to ask about. You sweet little Maimie! You dear little Maimie! You shall not be bothered and worried and made wicked fun of! You ought to be treated like a perfect little empress!'

Maimie let him kiss her sedately, her cheek flushing as he did so with a girl's first love; and then seated herself with a good grace once more where he placed her lightly down beside him among the heather.

'Well, now,' she said, holding up the little fan that hung at her side to hide her blushes; 'tell me all about these Cipriani people, will you?'

'Well,' Adrian answered, making a determined effort not to be too teasing, 'Jocelyn Cipriani is a collateral descendant of Sir Joshua's ally, and a son of old Raffaele Cipriani's. You know: old Raffaele Cipriani of the National Gallery.'

'Never heard of him in all my life before,' Maimie answered mischievously. She loved to display the profundity of her ignorance to the Oxford tutor.

'Possibly not,' Adrian went on, with a satirical smile. 'There are many people in London society whose fame has never yet penetrated as far as Silbury. However, old Cipriani was one of that particular form of irreclaimable brigand they used to call an Italian patriot. Nowadays the species is out of fashion, and people call them communists, and dynamiters, and other hard names; but in those days they were the height of the vogue, and people used to call them Italian patriots. Old Cipriani raised some sort of rebellion or other against his lawful sovereign —King Bomba, I suppose, or some equally atrocious old tax-squeezing figure-head—and got caught in the very act, of course without having effected anything. In those days dynamite wasn't yet invented, and even infernal machines were still in their infancy; and the intelligent patriot never did effect anything. So Cipriani *père* languished long in a damp, unhealthy, and doubtless rheumatic Italian dungeon; until at last his friends supplied him with a golden key wherewithal to corrupt the rudimentary morals of his stern gaoler. The gaoler promptly succumbed to Mammon; and the end of it was, Cipriani *père* ran away, stole a horse (of course, in the cause of freedom), rode across country over several incredible passes, swam a mysterious number of roaring torrents, all swollen (as usual) by the recent rains, and finally got shot in the side by a minion of despotism just as he was crossing the frontier river on the back of his

faithful stolen pony. In spite of this small accident, however, he continued his journey, bullet and all, without interruption; was profusely welcomed by an English administration, then congenially engaged in suppressing freedom of speech in Ireland—and therefore, of course, wildly enthusiastic over Italian unity; and, having brought a letter of introduction from Mazzini, or some other fashionable firebrand, was promptly pitchforked into a good post at the National Gallery—on the ground, apparently, that he was by birth an Italian, and therefore quite as likely as anybody else to know something or other about the old masters. On the same principle, as you may have acutely observed, Italy being the land of song, a small Italian boy is invariably selected for the high and congenial musical taste of grinding a barrel-organ.'

'I see,' Maimie put in, with a soft little laugh. 'And your Mr. Cipriani is a son of the patriot?'

'Exactly; my Mr. Cipriani, as you are good enough to call him, is a son of the patriot. Brought up under the very eyes of St. Sebastians and Madonnas, he drank in pre-Raphaelitism with his mother's milk, and began to draw St. John the Baptist in the Wilderness before he had learnt to read his Bible. But I forgot; you are not yourself acquainted with St. John the Baptist. Never mind; you must take it entirely on trust from me that he was a gentleman who despised the superfluities of tailors, and was addicted to a somewhat exclusive diet of locusts and wild honey. But as Jocelyn was something more than a mere painter, he went to Oxford, read hard, took a first, went in seriously for Greek antiquities, and had the inestimable privilege of making my acquaintance while we were both undergraduates together. Finally, being really by nature a great artist, he has risen early to be an R.A., and is now the most promising painter of the younger generation in all England. If only you will let him paint you for his Beatrice, Maimie, he will be the greatest painter in all Europe.'

Maimie acknowledged the implied compliment with a coquettish little nod of her shapely head.

'And Mrs. Cipriani,' she said, smiling; 'who was she?'

'Mrs. Cipriani,' Adrian Pym answered, with a careless

wave of his hand, 'was a very remote cousin of my own, and therefore, as you will at once infer, highly connected; but so exceedingly remote, in fact, that we never knew anything of one another till she married Jocelyn. However, another cousin of hers, Sydney Chevenix, is a very well-known person indeed; a man of science, and a distinguished Fellow of the Royal Society. He's a nephew of the old general, Sir Clavering Chevenix, of Chark Court, who left him nearly all his money. And, now I come to think of it, Maimie, it occurs to me it would be a very good thing indeed for you, when you go up to town for Jocelyn to paint you, if you could get introduced to Sydney Chevenix. Sydney Chevenix is a very decent, handsome young man. Sydney Chevenix is a distinguished authority on nitro-glycerine and all other explosive resources of civilization. Sydney Chevenix is still a bachelor. And Sydney Chevenix is the possessor of a very tidy, snug little fortune of something like two or three thousand a year, on coming into which he gave up his aboriginal trade of a country doctor. On two or three thousand a year, you know, a young married couple just beginning life can manage to make themselves exceedingly comfortable.'

'Well, Adrian?' Maimie said coldly.

'Well, Maimie,' the tutor replied, fidgeting about uneasily before her searching glance, 'you might do a worse thing for yourself, I can tell you, than pick up with Sydney Chevenix.'

'Adrian!'

'Why, Maimie, what's the matter with you? Don't get up and look so angry with me.'

'Adrian, you know as well as I do I don't want to marry Sydney Chevenix, if that's the man's name, or anybody else you choose to pick out for me. You know very well what I mean to do. I mean to marry—whom I please, Adrian.'

Adrian shuffled awkwardly on the ground. There was a slight pause; and then he began afresh upon a new subject.

'The horse is a noble animal,' he said, 'Maimie; and very useful to man, both in war and agriculture.'

Maimie laughed in spite of herself, but turned away half angrily.

'You don't love me,' she cried, 'Adrian! I always knew you didn't love me!'

Adrian caught her fervently in his arms.

'Maimie! Maimie! My own darling precious little Maimie!' he cried eagerly. 'I love you! I love you! You know I love you! A thousand times better than all else on earth I love you, Maimie!'

Maimie nestled close into his side, and sobbed away her fear upon his broad shoulder, as a frightened child sobs and nestles in its mother's bosom.

CHAPTER III.

EXPLOSIVES.

If there be any truth in old superstitions, Sydney Chevenix's ears ought to have tingled freely that August afternoon in his hot laboratory at Beaumont Terrace, Regent's Park, N.W. For at the exact moment when Adrian Pym was discoursing to Maimie of two or three thousand a year and a distinguished authority on nitro-glycerine, Hetty Cipriani was saying ingenuously to her lazy husband:

'If only we could get some nice girl like that, now, to make herself agreeable to Sydney Chevenix.'

And Jocelyn Cipriani answered from the beach:

'My dear child, Sydney Chevenix will never marry. He's wedded to his dynamite, and knows no other love beside. Leave him alone to blow himself up amicably at his leisure in his own laboratory. After all, Hetty, you're the most complimentary wife I ever met with, for you seem to be so perfectly enchanted with your own success in your choice of a man, that you're for ever trying to find suitable husbands for every other girl you come across anywhere.'

But at that precise moment of time, Sydney Chevenix, F.R.S., the rising chemist and distinguished authority on nitro-glycerine, was standing, with ears untouched by tingling, mixing a new projected explosive with his Polish assistant, Stanislas Benyowski.

'Have you ever seen it tried before, Benyowski?' Sydney Chevenix asked anxiously, as they kneaded up their soft grey paste with prodigious caution in a little brown experimental mortar. 'Do you know exactly what sort of explosive force it exerts, and how it's directed?'

'I have,' Benyowski answered, in English almost as perfect as Sydney's own. 'I saw it used once: it was at St. Petersburg. . . . The charge exploded with very little detonation, comparatively. . . . I believe, indeed, with careful experimentation, it might be made almost, if not quite, completely noiseless. . . . It blew up vertically, exerting hardly any lateral pressure. . . . It blew up the—— well, the objects above it, straight into the air; and when I last saw it, it had knocked—h'm—the objects in question—slap against the ceiling. But I didn't wait to see much of the explosion. The circumstances were unfavourable to scientific observation.' And Stanislas Benyowski smiled grimly, and stroked his beardless lantern jaws with his long thin fingers in a very self-satisfied and contemplative fashion.

'It was at St. Petersburg, you say?' Sydney Chevenix repeated, with a searching glance.

'At St. Petersburg. Yes, at St. Petersburg, patron. In fact, in the offices of the Third Section. Some Nihilists, I suppose,' and Stanilas Benyowski smiled even more grimly and strangely than before—'some Nihilists were attempting to remove unobtrusively the Chief of the Investigation Bureau in the Police Department. I happened to be present—quite accidentally, of course—on the morning of the experiment. . . . It was a beautiful operation, and it succeeded admirably. The Chief of the Investigation Bureau sat perched like a martinet that he was on a high seat at the end of the office: a Nihilist (never detected) placed a small quantity of the explosive, with detonator and hammer attached, underneath the stool on which he was seated: it exploded beautifully, and the Chief of the Investigation Bureau executed an upward movement of extraordinary rapidity towards the offices of the Superintendent of the Third Section, just overhead. For myself, though present only in the quality of spectator (I need hardly say), I

judged it prudent not to await the moment of his subsidence. In fact, I withdrew myself, hurriedly but unobtrusively.' And again Stanislas Benyowski's mouth twitched all over with suppressed humour at the delightful recollection of that eminently successful professional exploit.

'And you say it acted vertically only?' Sydney Chevenix went on, with scientific coolness, paying not the slightest heed or attention to the political and personal implications of Benyowski's very incriminating narrative. 'It lifted the object straight into the air, without at all displacing the surrounding bodies?'

'The high desk-stool, and the Chief of the Investigation Bureau on top of it, rose right up in a bee-line for the middle of the ceiling, exactly as if they had been shot out of a good-sized mortar; but the desk itself and the clerk beside him were never even so much as shaken—as far as an impartial spectator could perceive in the flurry of the moment.'

Sydney Chevenix paused for a minute, and went on resolutely pestling his explosive mixture with the utmost caution. Then he said in the appreciative voice of a warm enthusiast:

'That was a very neat and suggestive experiment indeed, Benyowski. It's a great advantage to me to have got hold of a man like yourself, who has really had some practical experience in the manufacture of these things by scientific methods. Your Jena training has been quite invaluable to me. If only I could get at Nobiling, now, we might manage to do great things between us in the way of explosives. There's a man for you—Nobiling! What a wonderfully inventive genius he has in the chemistry of the nitrogen compounds! I wish he didn't go and fritter away all his splendid scientific abilities on these wild and absurd revolutionary schemes of his. If the man would only be content to settle down and work regularly in a good laboratory at this sort of thing, he'd soon beat us all hollow as an original investigator at the science of the subject!'

Benyowski's lip curled, half in disdain, as he answered drily:

'You forget that while you men of science regard all this as an end in itself, to us men of politics it is not an

end, but a means only. The true end is the final regeneration of human society.'

The Englishman laughed.

'My dear fellow,' he said good-humouredly, laying his hand with a friendly emphasis upon Benyowski's shoulder, 'between you and me, all that is the merest moonshine. A good easy explosive for blasting rock with—a new power to cheapen the construction of railway tunnels, of canals, of docks, of harbours—a material that will enable us to do away at once with the Alps and the Pyrenees, with Panama and Caucasus, with the Himalayas and the Hindu Kush—that would be a thousand times more practically valuable to the world in the end than all your beautiful Utopian plans for the ultimate regeneration of human society by blowing up the Czar or the Chief of the Third Section. Of course, it doesn't matter in the least to me what you choose to do with your own explosives, as soon as you've made them. I'm a man of science, as you say—not a man of politics—and I don't know or care twopence about the rights and wrongs of Poland or of Russia. I know you're an excellent person to work with, and a good, trustworthy, valuable assistant. But don't go blowing up any more Russians, my dear fellow, I beg of you. It doesn't pay, in the long-run, and it isn't really worth it. . . . And so you think the stuff, if properly purified, might at last be made absolutely noiseless?'

'I do,' Benyowski answered with a nod. 'The vertical displacement might be so restricted by mutual interference of sound-waves, that no jar at all should be communicated in any way to the surrounding atmosphere. We've only got to perfect the invention—its jar is far less, as it is, than that of any other known explosive, and even that is no doubt entirely due to the demonstrable impurities present in the material—in order to succeed in getting the great desideratum of the present day—a perfectly noiseless detonating compound.'

'That would be splendid,' Sydney Chevenix cried, rubbing his hands briskly with all an inventor's contagious enthusiasm. 'Just picture to yourself the use of such an explosive in war, for example! You're fighting a lot of un-

civilized enemies, and you send out your sharp-shooters under cover somewhere, and they pick off the enemy, one by one, noiselessly, silently, unseen, unsuspected; and the unsophisticated savages don't even know they're being shot, or where the firing comes from, but merely find their men dropping down all around them like magic by the dozen, as if an invisible fire from heaven had suddenly smitten them, and cut them off, like Ahaziah's captains, without hope of respite. There's an engine of civilization for you!'

'And it's use in practical politics,' Stanislas Benyowski muttered doggedly. 'You're fighting a lot of enemies of the human kind—emperors and bureaucrats and such-like vermin—and you stick a little bit of the new explosive under the chief criminal's bed, and it goes off pop in the middle of the night, noiselessly, silently, unheard, unnoticed, and nobody ever even so much as suspects the miscreant's dead, till some flunkey or other goes in in the morning and finds the creature's remains lying in little fragments scattered all about promiscuously over the bed and carpet—here a leg, and there an arm, and yonder a rib or two! Ha! ha! that would be just magnificent, wouldn't it? That would, indeed, be developing the resources of civilization!'

And Stanislas Benyowski laughed silently the suppressed laugh of a professional plotter.

Sydney Chevenix looked hard at his assistant and smiled curiously. He was a tall, lithe, close-shaven man, the lantern-jawed Pole, with an odd dried-up look for his age; of Sydney Chevenix's own height and build, but thinner and more sinuous; of an adamantine firmness about his close-shaven chin and thin lips that spoke him at once a man of iron will and immovable determination. As a rule, the Pole was remarkably taciturn, morose, and self-centred. Sydney Chevenix had never before, indeed, heard him speak so frankly, or allude so unequivocally to his primitive trade of Russian revolutionist. The Englishman knew him only as an able expert in explosives, and engaged him as such without note or comment, asking no questions for conscience' sake, save purely scientific ones. Both men were over thirty, and both had the same clear-cut cast of

philosophical face, unencumbered by beard, moustache, or whiskers; but Sydney Chevenix was strikingly handsome and engaging in feature; while Benyowski's countenance had a grim hardness of outline and expression that sorted well with the stern mould of his revolutionary nature.

'Each to his own mind, Benyowski,' the Englishman said, turning cheerily to work. 'But we must pull together anyhow at this new stuff, whatever use we may choose to make of it in the end, each after his own fashion. It'll be a splendid thing, if only we can develop it. I shall work day and night at the investigation myself till I've got it perfect.'

Benyowski smiled again.

'And when it's perfect,' he added quietly, half below his breath, 'there will be new furniture and occupants required at the Winter Palace.'

'He's an excellent assistant,' Sydney Chevenix thought to himself silently; 'but I should certainly like him better in his private capacity if he wasn't quite so pugnaciously redolent of this blood-and-thundrous continental Nihilism.'

CHAPTER IV.

COUNCILS OF STATE.

As evening drew on, Stanislas Benyowski took down his hat from the peg in the corner and prepared to walk moodily out of Sydney Chevenix's neat little laboratory. He had relapsed long since into his usual grim morose silence, and Sydney had been far too busy with his own work to talk much further to his strange assistant; so the Pole, as he opened the door to go, merely inquired formally, in a mechanical way—

'Anything more to do this evening, patron?'

'No,' Sydney Chevenix answered; 'nothing more of any sort. Good-evening, Benyowski.'

'Good-evening, patron.'

And Stanislas Benyowski, hat in hand, walking stealthily and noiselessly, after the wont of conspirators, melted away

from his employer's sight up the laboratory stairs into the shades of evening.

But an hour later, after his mutton-chop and glass of Bavarian beer hastily swallowed at a little Italian coffee-shop in the recesses of Marylebone, he issued forth and became visible once more in the darkness of the gas-lamps on his road to a tall narrow tenement in a back street among the slums of Soho.

He mounted the long tortuous stairs of the lodging-house like one well accustomed to them, and knocked at the door of an attic chamber, which was cautiously opened and held half ajar by a dirty ill-shaven refugee Russian. The door-keeper scanned him attentively for a second, and then exclaimed in his own tongue:

'It is well. Benyowski! Come in, brother. They are all here but you; the meeting awaits you.'

Benyowski entered and glanced around him by the dim light of the paraffin-lamp on the table at the dozen or fifteen assembled Nihilists. A very villainous lot they looked, most of them; though two or three had the young and handsome faces of student enthusiasts; and among them, at the head of the long table, sat a couple of women, both of them beautiful, with a frank, open, fearless sort of beauty, such as one associates in one's mental pictures with the memory of Charlotte Corday or of the Maid of Orleans. Benyowski nodded familiarly to all, and then took his seat near the head of the council board, in the second place of honour at the long table, side by side with the elder of the two women.

'What is the business before the meeting, to-night?' one of the ill-shaven men at the bottom of the board asked gruffly. 'Why has an extraordinary conclave been called this evening before the regular day of assembly on Wednesday next?'

The youngest and handsomest of the two girls, who evidently acted in the place of secretary, drew forth a little book of cyphered minutes, and began to read in a subdued voice, but with a certain studied air of official impressiveness:

'Republic of all the Russias, Anarchical and Indissoluble.

In the Name of the Will of the People. Amen. Meeting of the Provisional Council of the English Section, 18th of August, New Style. Business under consideration — impeachment of Michael Stefanovitch Komissaroff, late treasurer.'

They did not speak or act like conspirators; they did not whisper, or look around them suspiciously, or garble their language. Why should they? In their own eyes they were not conspirators, or criminals, or murderers, but the just embodiment of the entire anarchical Russian commonwealth.

'What is the accusation against Brother Michael Stefanovitch?' the ill-shaven man at the bottom once more inquired.

'He is suspected of betraying the secrets of the Council to Alexander Alexandrovitch,' the secretary answered, pressing her hand carelessly across the straying fringe that fell down too low upon her fair white forehead.

'Who delates, Vera Trotsky?' Stanislas Benyowski asked calmly.

'No. 1244,' the secretary replied, glancing down with an offhand look at her papers.

There was a short but animated discussion as to the inferential proofs of Michael Komissaroff's suspected treachery—very slight ones, it must be candidly confessed, and for some twenty minutes the question of guilt or innocence was hotly debated by all the party, save only Stanislas Benyowski; he looked on carelessly with the weary air of a man who knows that all these things matter in the end less than nothing. It was a noisy debate, all dim surmise and misty suspicion, after the hazy wont of conspirators in general. Then at last the secretary, arranging her brooch and collar automatically with her small white twitching hands, as if to make herself neat and tidy for so important a function, put the question to the vote with due solemnity, after hearing all arguments:

'Is it the will of the Council that justice be executed on the person of Michael Stefanovitch Komissaroff, traitor to the Republic, Anarchical and Indissoluble, and to the united Will of the Russian People? Those who are in favour of the motion, hold up their right hand in token of approval.'

Every right hand around the whole table was held up unanimously as a vote of condemnation.

'Per contra,' the secretary said again, looking round the room with an amused smile of official scrupulosity.

Nobody responded.

'The sentence is carried,' Vera Trotsky said calmly, making a little note of the deadly decision in her wee minute-book. 'Stanislas Benyowski, prepare the decree, to carry out the Will of the Sovereign People.'

Stanislas Benyowski leant over the table, pencil in hand, for a few minutes, and then read aloud in a clear voice the draught form of official decree he had prepared for the occasion.

'Republic of all the Russians, etc., etc. Meeting of the Provisional Council of the English Section, 18th of August, New Style. The Council,

'Seeing that Michael Stefanovitch Komissaroff, formerly treasurer, has been found guilty on suspicion, by delation of No. 1244, as set forth in letter in cypher from Nijni Novgorod, dated July 14, O. S., of treachery against the Republic and the Will of the People,

'Decrees

'That the said Michael Stefanovitch Komissaroff, formerly treasurer, be removed by such means as may prove most convenient, the execution of this decree being left to the person chosen by lot to give effect to the commands of the Council.

'By order:
'The Acting Intendant,
'Stanislas Benyowski: 3247.'

'Is the decree accepted?' the secretary asked, looking around the table once more, in the midst of still and deathlike silence.

All hands went up immediately.

'The Council accepts the decree,' Vera Trotsky said, turning round with a bow to Benyowski.

Benyowski bowed slightly in return, in a wearied fashion.

'Draw lots,' the indefatigable secretary went on, putting

a number of small pieces of paper, one only inscribed, into a hat in the middle of the table.

They all drew in solemn silence.

As each man unfolded his scrap of paper with trembling fingers, they turned to see who had drawn the one lot bearing the accustomed legend, 'Death to the traitor.'

Stanislas Benyowski held it up, unmoved, listless as ever, between his thumb and finger.

'The Unconscious has selected me for the task of vengeance,' he said quietly. 'Komissaroff shall be removed at the earliest opportunity. I will report progress to the next meeting.'

'Has anybody any other business to bring forward?' the secretary asked, as unconcernedly as though they had just decided some petty question of everyday routine. 'No? Nothing? Then the meeting stands adjourned officially till the usual hour next Wednesday.'

And all at once, everybody dropped forthwith the solemn air of a political conclave; pipes and cigarettes were produced on every hand. The two ladies accepted, with smiles and nods, two dainty little rolls of scented Latakia from Benyowski's case, which they proceeded to light without the faintest compunction; and the meeting resolved itself straightway into a social conversation club of easy-going Nihilists, with no more outward appearance of bloodthirsty underlying political designs than one would see on any day of the week in any honest Frenchified Soho café.

'Read it?' Mdlle. Vera Trotsky remarked cheerfully, in reply to a question from Stanislas Benyowski. 'Oh yes; I've read it, and rather liked it. I read them all as they come out. But I don't care much for Turguenieff now; I've got beyond him. I swear by Zola and the new naturalism.'

CHAPTER V.

THE SYSTEM.

MAIMIE was delighted and charmed with Hetty Cipriani, like a child with a new toy, as soon as Adrian Pym had concluded their introduction to one another. Mrs. Cipriani was the sweetest little woman Maimie had ever seen in all her life: she was a perfect darling—a real pet—a dear old creature—a delightfully clever, sympathetic companion; and Maimie chatted away to her freely after two days' acquaintance, with all the familiarity of a lifelong friend, about the fishermen, and the children, and the Silbury boys, and the Oxford men, and especially and particularly about Adrian Pym, whom she roundly described as just a dear, and such a regular jolly good fellow.

'Then you're very fond of him, Maimie?' Hetty Cipriani said archly—nobody ever dreamt from the first moment they saw her of calling Maimie by any name so stiff and formal as 'Miss Llewellyn'—'then you're very fond of him, and think him delightful? What a pity fellows of Oxford colleges are not allowed to get married!'

Maimie blushed just a very little (she was far too natural to blush profusely at such a simple reference to an obvious possibility), and answered lightly:

'Oh! well, you know, if it comes to that, Mrs. Cipriani, he isn't going to be a fellow always. He's called to the Bar, I think you call it—at any rate, he's a barrister—and he means some day to go up to London and to build up a practice for himself in the Temple. You know he teaches law already, and knows as much about it—oh, quite as much about it as a regular lawyer.'

'That's well,' Hetty answered, smiling. 'But, Maimie, you really mustn't call me Mrs. Cipriani. It sounds so dreadfully stiff and formal, as if I were a perfect ogre, and you were dreadfully afraid of me. Besides, I like to feel myself still as young as you are. Call me Hetty. It's so much nicer to be friendly together.'

'I should like to be like a sister with you, Hetty,' Maimie replied simply. 'But Mr. Cipriani? I could never call

him "Jocelyn," I'm sure, though I always call Mr. Pym Adrian.'

Jocelyn laughed and answered for his wife:

'The cases are not exactly parallel, Maimie,' he said good-humouredly. 'Pym stands to you in a somewhat more delicate relation, I fancy, though I wish you would call me Jocelyn, really. It isn't every day in these latter times that I get any pretty girls beside my wife to honour me by dispensing with the use of my surname.'

But Maimie shook her head to that; and so it was Hetty and Maimie alone between the two women from that day forth, for Maimie seemed to fall readily into the habit with all the pretty, childlike simplicity of her innocent, unsophisticated, country-bred nature.

A few days after their first meeting, Jocelyn and Hetty were sitting in their lodgings, when they heard a loud voice upon the stairs, with Maimie's soft and clear little tones acting silver treble to the bass of a great sailor throat which thundered out deep music beside her.

'So these are your foreigner friends, Maimie,' the redoubtable Captain cried out loudly, as he pervaded the one wee sitting-room with his colossal presence. 'These are your new London friends, are they, with the Frenchified name and the trade of painter? Good-morning, sir; good-morning, Mrs. Somebody. I can't screw my honest English tongue around your outlandish crack-jaw foreigner lingo, I'm sorry to tell you; but I'm glad to meet you all the same—I'm glad to meet you; and Maimie tells me you've been very kind to her.'

'We have been delighted, I'm sure, to make Miss Llewellyn's acquaintance,' Jocelyn answered, with ordinary formal politeness.

The Captain opened his eyes in amazement.

'Miss Llewellyn?' he repeated blankly. 'Miss Llewellyn? Who the dickens said anything about Miss Llewellyn? Why, God bless my soul! there must be a precious mistake somewhere. My sister Lizzie's been dead this ten years. Oh, ah! I see; you mean Maimie! God bless my soul! Why, yes, yes, you mean Maimie. Nobody ever calls her Miss Llewellyn, bless you! Oh, ah! Maimie's glad to see

strangers at any time; and she's quite lost her heart, I believe, to Mrs. Somebody.'

'We hope,' Hetty said, 'you'll let Maimie come up some day and stop with us in London. My husband's very anxious to put her in a picture, and he'd like immensely to have some sittings from her.'

The old Captain looked askance at Hetty, as if he sniffed mischief at once in the uncanny proposal.

'You won't go putting ideas into her head?' he said suspiciously. 'Not go teaching her a pack of trumpery superstitious devil-dodging nonsense, I mean, will you? Maimie's a girl that I've brought up myself under my own eye very particularly; never allowed any sentimental trash to come anywhere near her. And what's the consequence? She's a sensible girl, Maimie is; aren't you, Maimie? She steers a boat or pulls a sheet as well as any sailor; don't you, Maimie? She can hit a target on the gold at forty yards; can't you, Maimie?'

'I can, papa,' Maimie answered, with a bewitching smile, which seemed to guarantee at once that all her father's strenuous efforts to turn her (against nature) into a perfect tomboy had been happily frustrated by underlying softness of disposition.

'But I won't let her go to London,' the old man went on very decidedly. 'I won't let her go to London, Mrs. Somebody. It won't do to let her get her head completely turned by a pack of foreigner people painting her and flattering her and telling lies to her. She's a pretty girl, and a nice girl; but she mustn't be allowed on any account to think so. It doesn't do to put these notions into children's heads; it unsettles them—it unsettles them. No, Mr. Somebody; it's very natural you should want to exercise your trade of painter—you're a sort of Admiral of the Fleet at it, Maimie tells me—but I can't have you painting Maimie. Maimie, my child, I can't have him going painting you and turning your head for you. You're a country-bred girl, you are, with no nonsense in you; and I won't have them putting any rubbish into you. Have you got any nonsense about you, Maimie—got any nonsense?'

'No, papa,' Maimie answered, laughing; 'I certainly haven't.'

'No, Mrs. Somebody,' the old Captain assented, with a sagacious nod; 'she certainly hasn't. She's been brought up clean away from all nonsense, all hypocrisy, all humbug of every kind; and you won't find a better girl going anywhere than our Maimie. She's been brought up obedient to reason, and to reason only. I've treated her systematically with pure reason. I'm an old sailor, and on board ship we used all to have a great deal too much authority and too little reason. I hate authority—I detest authority; I'm all for reason. Maimie, my dear, I'm opposed to authority, am I not, and all for reason?'

'You are, papa,' Maimie answered promptly, with a tolerant nod. 'I always agree with everything papa says, you know, Hetty, because it pleases him; and I can always do just as I like myself all the same, because, whatever I say, it doesn't matter.'

Hetty noted with some amusement that they both always spoke before one another, completely ignoring each other's presence—a peculiarity due, no doubt, to the obvious fact that they lived perpetually at cross-purposes, without at all conflicting with one another's proceedings.

'But you'll surely allow Maimie to come up to town and stop with me, Captain Llewellyn?' Hetty said coaxingly. 'She's never been in London, and she ought to go there. She's dying to go—aren't you, Maimie?'

Maimie clasped her hands together, and turned her eyes up to the ceiling as she answered rapturously:

'Oh yes; it would be just heavenly!'

'Just what?' the Captain cried, in a sharp tone of astonished exclamation.

'Just heavenly!' Maimie repeated, unconscious of her crime.

'There's no such thing,' the Captain burst out, reddening in the face. 'There's no such place. There's no such land at all on the Admiralty chart. There's no such world; there's no such existence anywhere as heaven. And even if there were, it wouldn't in the least resemble London. On the contrary, Mr. Shelley, who's a good authority, says the

other place, Mrs. Somebody, is a deal more like it. "Hell," he says, "is a city much like London." A sound, sensible, reasonable writer, for a poet, Shelley. No nonsense about him; or, at any rate, very little. But to think, Maimie, I should hear my own daughter, after all the care I've taken with her bringing-up, using to my face such a word as "heavenly"! It's too disheartening. I believe, upon my soul, you've been going to church without my knowledge, you deceitful girl, you!'

'I haven't indeed, papa,' Maimie answered, indignantly repudiating the baseless accusation; 'I've only picked the word up in the course of talking. I didn't know it was a wrong word to use, or I wouldn't have used it, indeed, Hetty. But I think, you know, it would be just lovely.'

'You'll let her come, won't you, Captain Llewellyn?' Jocelyn asked, as persuasively as possible.

'No, I won't,' the old sailor replied, with gruff stolidity. 'I've got to watch over her myself, you see, sir, and I can't afford to let her go up to London. Here she never sees any men or anybody, except young Pym, from Oxford, and those nice, well-behaved, quiet young pupils of his—boys, boys, boys, all the lot of them. I won't have notions put into her head. She's a country girl down here; if you go and take her up to London you'll turn her head, and make a fine lady at once of her. Maimie, my dear, you shall not go to London, and you shall not be made into a fine lady.'

'Very well, papa,' Maimie answered, unclasping her hands, but looking very little disappointed indeed, all things considered. 'Of course, Hetty, he'll let me go sooner or later. I shall make him do whatever I want him. I shall twist him round my little finger. He's a dear old fellow in some ways, although he's so grumpy. I always get my own way in the end with him and with everybody. I shall go to London by-and-by, and Mr. Cipriani shall paint me, and it'll be just heavenly—I mean delightful. We shall have no end of fun in London together!'

CHAPTER VI.

THE RESULT OF THE SYSTEM.

A FEW evenings later, as the sun was setting, Adrian Pym lay once more among the purple heather upon the West Cliff, and Maimie sat threading daisies together, like the child that she was, on the grass beside him.

'And so you're going away from Silbury next week, Adrian,' she said plaintively, turning her big brown eyes full upon him; 'and then the great, nasty, long, dull winter will be coming on; and the season will be over, and all the fun; and you'll be gone, and all the Oxford men; and there'll be nothing left on earth for me to do but to sit and mope and talk to the fishermen—and count the days till summer comes again!'

'You're too frank and too flattering, really, Maimie,' the Oxford tutor answered, holding her hand in his lazily. 'You want to be wooer and wooed at once. Don't you know that you ought to leave the love-making to me, little one, and not to do it all of yourself on your own account? Man proposes; woman accepts. Besides, perhaps, for aught you know to the contrary, I may take my reading-party to John o' Groat's or Land's End next July, instead of to Silbury.'

'Oh, Adrian! Adrian! You wicked man! You don't love me! Not one bit; I'm sure you don't love me. Everybody else I ever meet loves me dearly, except only you; and yet you're just the very one of all others I want the most of all to be desperately loved by.'

'The natural perversity of things,' Adrian Pym responded with provoking calmness, yet taking her plump little dimpled hand between both his own, and stroking it long and slow with affectionate persistence. 'Eros Duseros—criss-cross love—the Greeks used to call the tendency, Maimie. Whom we love, loves not us; and who loves us, we somehow love not. . . . Maimie, Maimie, my sweet little Maimie, I only wish to God I didn't love you!'

The last words came suddenly and unexpectedly with a strange burst from the depths of his bosom, and as he said

them he flung her hand away from him vehemently, as if ashamed and afraid of his own tenderness.

'You will come to Silbury again next summer, Adrian,' Maimie whispered softly. 'You won't leave me for two whole years without ever so much as once seeing you, will you?'

Adrian Pym faltered and hesitated.

'Why do you press me, Maimie?' he cried at last in a low voice, with suppressed vehemence. 'Why do you try to force my hand? Why do you torture me and tantalize me for ever? Haven't I told you, over and over again, that I love you, darling—love you dearly, devotedly, madly—love you as I never loved any other woman in all my life before, Maimie; but that I can never, never, never marry you!'

'I don't want you to marry me,' Maimie answered low in a soft, quiet, musical whisper. 'I want you to come to Silbury often and sit with me here on the West Cliff, and hold my hands, so, in yours, and tell me you love me better than anybody, and make my heart beat as it's beating now —and—and—and— . . . that's all, Adrian.'

Adrian Pym rubbed the hollow palms of his clasped hands hard together, and murmured in a voice as of terrible pain:

'Don't, don't—please don't, Maimie!'

'I shall,' Maimie answered. 'I shall say it if I choose; I tell you, Adrian, I love you better than all the rest; and if I like, I shall tell you to your face I love you—I love you. Oh, Adrian, darling, it makes my heart thrill so.'

'Maimie, Maimie, Maimie, you will kill me! You will kill me!'

'Why, darling—why can't you love me? Do tell me, please, now, why can't you love me?'

'I *can* love you, Maimie. That's just the worst of it. I wish to God I couldn't. I do love you, and I can't help loving you. From the very first moment I ever saw you, when you were only a little girl just turned fifteen, I loved you, Maimie. I loved you—I loved you.'

'I know you did, Adrian. I always knew it. So why

need you make such a terrible mystery of it? Why can't you come to Silbury again next summer?'

'Because, Maimie—you *will* wring it from me—I love you too well! I mustn't keep up this strain upon your affections any longer, my darling. I must leave you to love some one else who can really marry you, which I can never do. I—I must go away and leave you for ever.'

Maimie clutched his hands tight in hers, as if to hold him and keep him.

'Why, darling—why?' she whispered softly.

The man turned away and clenched his fists till the nails dug deep into the palms within.

'Because, my darling,' he cried in anguish—'oh, Maimie, Maimie, I can never tell you!'

'Yes—yes; tell me, Adrian. I believe I know. I believe I can guess it. Tell me—tell me!'

'Maimie, Maimie, I'm married already!'

Maimie turned to him with a long deep breath. Her face flushed a beautiful crimson, and her lips parted as if to speak, but said nothing. The tears rose slowly into her big dark eyes and fell one by one upon her soft flushed cheek. Then, breaking away to him in a sudden access of passion, she nestled at once upon Adrian's shoulder with a childlike air of trustful confidence.

'My darling!' she cried at last, as the tears rose up hotter and faster; 'my darling! my darling!—is that all? Then you will come to Silbury, won't you, next summer?'

She threw herself back with her breast on his, and her baby-face looking up all entreaty into his cold blue eyes; and Adrian Pym thought he had never in all his life seen the beautiful girl look lovelier or more innocent than in that supreme moment of complete surrender. He had expected she would have drawn back, as any other girl would have done, in horror and dismay at his crushing announcement; instead of that, she clung to him harder and more lovingly than ever, as if her arms could never release their tight hold of his neck and shoulders.

'My darling! my darling!' she went on whispering; 'it's nothing—it's nothing! You will love me still! You will never forsake me!'

'Maimie,' the tutor cried half sternly, shamed into momentary respect for the conventions of morality by her childlike self-abandonment, 'you mustn't cling to me so; it isn't right of you. You ought to be angry—angry and shocked at me. You oughtn't to go on loving me so; you oughtn't to speak another word to me.'

'I dare say I oughtn't,' Maimie answered low, clutching him still harder and pressing against him till he could feel her heart leap in her bosom. 'I dare say I oughtn't. I don't know: I don't understand about all these things like other people, you know, darling. I haven't been brought up to understand them. I never had a mother to tell me all about them. I can only do what my instincts tell me. But if you've got a wife already, Adrian, you don't take her about with you now anywhere; so I hope you'll come to Silbury again, and love me always the same as you've always done.'

Adrian seized her eagerly in his arms and covered her face with warm long kisses.

'Maimie, Maimie,' he cried in an outburst of hot irrepressible passion, 'you're too innocent or too wicked, I'm sure I don't know which; but you mustn't talk so—you mustn't talk so. I don't know what you'll make me do if you go on talking so any longer.'

'I can't help it,' Maimie answered, soft and low, clinging to him still like a child to its mother. 'I'm so happy, so happy—so supremely happy! O Adrian, I'm so glad to know it's only that! You can love me still, can't you, my darling?'

'But Maimie, Maimie! I mustn't, I mustn't. Apart from every other consideration, it's wrong to you, it's spoiling your life, it's blighting your future, all for my own selfish personal gratification. You mustn't love me any longer, darling. I ought never to have let you begin loving me. But it grew up so slowly, so slowly, between us. You must forgive me. I never knew what we were really driving at till—till it had all gone too far for me to draw back, Maimie.'

'And you're not going to draw back now, I hope. Are you, Adrian?'

'My child, I must; there's no help for it. This has gone a great deal too far already. I alone am to blame. It's my fault—my fault entirely. Yet how could I help myself? Who on earth can help falling madly in love with you as soon as ever they see you, Maimie?'

'Adrian, I'm so happy—so perfectly happy! I never quite felt sure till to-night that you really, really, really loved me. You were so odd at times, and seemed so stand-off. You would not tell me why you didn't marry me. I understand it all now. I'm so happy, for you really love me.'

Adrian leant back on the grass with her hand in his, and lay silent and doubtful, struggling with himself internally for a few minutes.

'Maimie, Maimie!' he cried at last, 'I must go away and leave you. I must put an end to all this. I must never, never, come back again to vex you.'

Maimie did not answer him at all, but merely sat, soothing his hand and stroking his face, and looking as if her happiness was absolutely complete. She had dried her eyes altogether now. She had cried only tears of joy in the first sudden access of delight at finding Adrian's terrific secret was, after all, so very unimportant a one; but the beautiful flush spread over her face still, and her heart was beating fast though evenly. After a long dreamy pause she spoke once more.

'Tell me how it all happened,' she whispered, 'Adrian.'

The tutor turned and looked her timidly in the face, as if half afraid to trust himself to look upon her.

'It was long ago, Maimie,' he said apologetically. 'I was an undergraduate then—a mere boy—no older than the boys I bring down here for you to flirt with nowadays. I was a fool, as all boys are: it is incidental to the human mind to pass through a stage of temporary idiocy about the age of twenty. You may observe that all the undergraduates I bring down here now are invariably idiots—the whole blushing stammering pack of them.' Maimie nodded a passing acquiescence. 'The girl was a barmaid—yes, a mere barmaid at an inn at Hastings. I fell in love with her as I fancied then—I hadn't met you yet, Maimie, and didn't know what falling in love

really means: no man falls in love in earnest till he's past thirty. Before that, we play with light loves in the portal, and wince, and relent, and refrain: at thirty, a man begins to know he's a man, and begins to know, too, what sort of stuff women are made of. Well, Maimie, not to bore you with the petty details of an unprofitable story, I married the woman—positively married her, like an ass that I was, and never told the Oriel people one word about it. For awhile I went to live with her in the vacations, and we got on well enough together, before the inevitable awakening. But the awakening came, and we agreed to part. Nobody but myself and her knows anything about it. I took my fellowship—which I hold by a straw—and I make her an allowance every month. That's all the foolish, hateful story, Maimie. As law goes, she can taboo me, like the dog in the manger, from all other women whom I could love better. So now you know why I can't marry you, and why I can never, never marry you.'

'And do you love her, Adrian?'

'Love her, Maimie! Love that woman! I hate her! I hate her! With all the profoundest hate in my whole nature, I utterly hate and detest her! She has wrecked my life for me—wrecked it and ruined it; and now—now, worse than all, Maimie, she will prevent me for ever from marrying you, my own darling!'

'But she can't prevent you from loving me, Adrian!'

She spoke it with such perfect innocence and simplicity, looking up once more at him with infinite love in her big, beautiful, open eyes, that Adrian Pym, for all his philosophy, was fairly staggered and astonished at her calmness. Even from Maimie, child of nature that she was, he didn't expect such absolute unconventionality, as he himself would have preferred to call it.

'My darling,' he cried, kissing her forehead tenderly, like a father—he dared not kiss her ripe red lips at such a moment—'you mustn't talk so; for my sake, you really mustn't. If you do, I don't know what act of irretrievable folly you may not drive me to. Hate me, Maimie; hate me, and be angry with me. I have wronged you deeply; reproach me, reproach me. But don't look at me like that

—don't say you love me; be angry with me—be angry, or else you'll kill me!'

'Adrian,' Maimie said once more, in a pleading voice, 'whether you're married or whether you're not, you'll come again next year to Silbury, won't you, darling?'

Adrian faltered.

'I don't know,' he answered evasively. 'If I really loved you—if I did what was best for you, Maimie—I'd go away and never, never again come near you. But I'm too weak; I haven't strength of mind for it. If only you had sprung away from me when I first told you, and been shocked and horrified, and cried out that I was a cruel wretch, and all that sort of thing, I could have gone away easily enough for ever. But when you throw yourself like that upon my shoulder, and ask me still to come next year—though you know no good can conceivably arise from it, and that I can never by any possibility marry you—why, flesh and blood can't possibly resist you. I'm a poor, weak, miserable creature, Maimie, and I haven't strength of mind to do what I know I ought to do.'

Maimie grasped his hand tight.

'I'm so glad you're a poor weak creature,' she said gaily, 'and that you haven't strength of mind enough to do what you ought to do. Then you'll come again next summer to Silbury! . . . That's a good boy! That's a dear! That's a darling! . . . Now, you must give me just one more kiss—one more only—and then I must go back down to the village, for papa'll be wondering what on earth's become of me. That'll do, darling. I love you! I love you! Good-night, Adrian. I'll say good-night to you now, for the sake of a kiss, because we can't kiss one another down on the Parade, you know; but you must walk home with me, of course, to our own door, for papa knows it's all right as long as I've only been out with you, darling. He doesn't like me to be out so late with the undergraduates. He says the undergraduates are very well-conducted young fellows, only that I mustn't walk out with them late in the evenings. But when I'm with you, he knows, of course, that everything's all quite right and proper.'

CHAPTER VII.

POLITICS IN ACTION.

THAT same afternoon, at Sydney Chevenix's laboratory in London, Stanislas Benyowski, silent and glowering by himself in the corner, seized the opportunity, when Sydney Chevenix was out of the room, to take his cigar-case out of his pocket and select four large cigars with much deliberation out of the five that were in it. The fifth he noted carefully with his eyes, observing that it had a small white mark on one of its sides, made by a flaw in the outer leaf, not far from the tapering end intended for the mouthpiece.

The four selected ones he opened dexterously by means of his pocket-knife, unrolling the outer leaf of the tobacco with the air of an expert, and excavating a little hollow in the centre of each, near the lower end, into which he thrust a small grey lump of some tough but flexible dough-like substance.

'One of those will do for friend Komissaroff,' he thought to himself gaily. 'And I haven't made such a bad job of it as an amateur would either. The leaf rolls back quite neatly and naturally. A trifle of wax on the inside will soon set it all right again to look at. That's excellently done. It wasn't for nothing that I served my four years in the Imperial Tobacco Factory at Dorpat, in Livonia.'

And he replaced the cigar-case quietly in his pocket before Sydney Chevenix returned to the laboratory.

'A lucky thing,' he said meditatively in his own soul, as he went on unmoved with his work at the chemicals, 'that friend Komissaroff happens to be given so much to the river. I'm sure to knock up against him before very long, and this'll settle the matter amicably.'

When work was finished, Stanislas Benyowski took his hat down from the peg, nodded in a familiar way to his employer, and turned listlessly out into the streets of London. It was a lovely autumn evening, still early—not more than five o'clock, for he had left off work betimes—and he strolled on with no very definite object townwards, down Portland Place and into Regent Street.

A policeman nodded to him in a friendly manner as he passed the Circus. Stanislas Benyowski returned the nod in a silent, morose, curious fashion—for the constable was a Pole and an ex-Nihilist, employed as a sort of special policeman for the foreign quarter around Soho and Regent Street.

Walking down Waterloo Place, he saw a shabbily dressed man a little in front of him, making his way in the direction of Charing Cross foot-bridge. Benyowski started.

'This is a strange accident,' he thought to himself silently. 'The Unconscious has delivered him at once into my hand. Hartmann is right. It sometimes strangely approaches design in the marvellous patness of its opportune coincidences. The old-fashioned mind would have seen in this the finger of Providence. We see in it rather the working of the Unconscious. Both are inscrutable, divine, mysterious.'

'Ho, Komissaroff!' he cried in Russian to the man in front of him; 'it's ages since I've seen you. Where are you off to now, my dear fellow?'

Komissaroff turned and answered in a friendly voice, as he brought down his palm on Benyowski's, outstretched to receive it:

'I go down to Guildford to row on the river. I am in need of exercise. I and my friends, we keep our boat there.'

'Good!' Benyowski cried, with evident pleasure. 'The fates are propitious. I will go down with you. Oddly enough, I too have an engagement to-day at Guildford. No, not boating, friend Komissaroff; another little appointment of a more delicate nature. Be not too curious; it is a feminine failing. We will go together to Guildford Station.'

They went together, the Russian talking volubly all the way; and then Benyowski insisted on seeing his friend down to the river-side and into his boat before leaving to fulfil his mysterious engagement. As Komissaroff was on the point of pushing off from the shore, the Pole drew his cigar-case casually from his pocket, selected a cigar with a studious care that seemed almost unnecessary, and passed the case on politely to his neighbour, with a nod of invita-

tion. Komissaroff took it, chose a cigar, returned the case with a smile, and pushed off gaily into the middle of the river.

The Wey is a lonely stream up among the willowy reaches away towards Godalming. The Pole stood watching him with grim eyes till he was well out of sight behind the bending willows, and, casting around a furtive look, returned quickly to the station, and jumped into the next train for London. He went through the whole little episode—for it was nothing more to Stanislas Benyowski—with the reckless humour of a man long accustomed to taking his life in his hands, and but scantily disposed to reckon upon the consequences. But, before lighting his own cigar, he weighed it well in his hand, and probed it slightly with the point of his pocket-knife.

'Good,' he said to himself, with imperturbable calmness; 'this is the empty one. Komissaroff has taken one of the loaded. I shall see a notice in the papers to-morrow—"Boating Accident on the River Wey at Guildford." Ha! ha! that will settle him. It's just enough to upset the boat and stun him quietly, so that he'll sink to the bottom and get drowned in peace, without in any way disfiguring him or creating awkward and foolish suspicions. A good stroke of business well done! How very lucky that I happened to meet him there just this evening! The Unconscious is kind. But there's design in it, too; human design in it. If I hadn't known Komissaroff was given to boating, I couldn't have laid such a trap for him so easily.'

And he lighted his own cigar gaily, with the approving conscience of a man who knows in his heart he has done his plain and evident duty not only well, but also cleverly.

At the next meeting of the Provisional Council of the Russian Republic, Anarchical and Indissoluble, Acting Intendant Brother Stanislas Benyowski, No. 3247, rose to report drily, in the most business-like possible manner, that, three evenings previously, Michael Stefanovitch Komissaroff, formerly treasurer, had been drowned in the River Wey, at Guildford, by the sudden upsetting of a boat in which he was taking his wonted exercise. And when the leader of

the Council—one Karl Trapmann, a Russianized German—inquired casually, 'Had you any hand in it?' Benyowski answered, with a quiet smile:

'Enough that the decree is carried out. No need to ask particulars of the means. But I can put as much explosive into a cigar, I tell you, friend Trapmann, as will blow a suspected traitor gently out of a boat into the water, and defy those clumsy English policemen ever to detect it. It is bad work to trifle nowadays with the Will of the People.'

CHAPTER VIII.

HIGH SEAS.

DURING the remainder of the Ciprianis' stay at King's Silbury, Maimie and Hetty were much together, and saw a great deal of one another. The amiable heathen, as Adrian Pym had rightly called her, was such a bright, gay, merry little thing that Hetty loved to see her running in every morning, with a nod and a smile for the landlady and her daughter, and a bunch of fresh roses in a little basket from the Captain's cottage-garden for herself and Jocelyn. To be sure, Maimie was at times a trifle sadder than usual that last week (for was not Adrian Pym going so soon to leave Silbury?), but not much, for Maimie's was not a nature to take readily to sadness, whatever came; and she consoled herself with the thought that Adrian loved her—that was enough, and no need to cry over it. She felt now she understood him better. He loved her really, in spite of that strange occasional moodiness of his. And, besides, they shared a secret now between them; and, young as Maimie was, she knew already by intuition there is nothing on earth to bind two people close together like common possession of an incriminating secret.

But the time wore away, and the day came which was to be Adrian's last but one in Silbury.

That afternoon the sea was running high and breezy, and the breakers were tumbling in—not boisterously, but finely—on the beach in front of Jocelyn Cipriani's summer

lodgings. Jocelyn himself, seated in the bow-window that faced the Parade, was looking out with immense interest upon the huge white cataracts as they followed one another in rapid succession upon the jutting ledges of the beach opposite. It was a grand sight, and a very beautiful one. Jocelyn Cipriani gloated over it with a painter's appreciation. Presently a small, dark cloud rose with ominous rapidity upon the pale horizon, and sudden little whiffs of gusty wind came swirling past, driving the autumn dust in eddying circles upon the narrow, gravelled roadway straight in front of him.

'Wind's freshening,' Jocelyn called out cheerily through the open window to the taut coastguardsman, as he passed with his glass under his arm before the little lodging-house.

'Ay, ay, sir,' the man replied, with a friendly salute, peering anxiously out to sea to south-westward; 'a nasty squall driving up the Channel. We shall have a capful o' wind, I take it, afore nightfall.'

Jocelyn sat there, lazy still, watching the breakers tumbling upon the shore, and presently took down his field-glasses from the mantelpiece, and proceeded to scan the hard line of the grey horizon.

'Is that a sail out there, Hetty?' he asked, pointing with his forefinger to a mere speck away out upon the Channel. 'If so, she's got no right to be out in such weather as this, I warrant, for she's a mere skiff, a little cock-boat, a nothing of a craft for such a stormy evening.'

'It *is* a sail,' Hetty answered decisively, marking it with care; 'a small boat with a very big sail on, and she seems to be knocking about dreadfully on the top of the waves, too, as well as I can see with the glass, Jocelyn.'

Even as they spoke, a fresh gust came suddenly round the cliffs from westward, and drove the dust and leaves before it in a tiny whirlwind with unexpected vehemence. It was one of those ugly rapid bursts of wind that often sweep in hilly country down a funnel-shaped valley on to the open sea in treacherous weather.

'Nasty squall, sir,' a fisherman cried from the beach to Jocelyn. 'Seems to be a sail, that there, out yonder to windward.'

'Yes,' Jocelyn answered unconcernedly. 'I dare say we shall hear of an accident, too, before morning. *Dulce mari magno*, said old Lucretius. The cruel old brute; for all his philosophy, he would have positively enjoyed it!'

A few minutes later, a second fisherman came up from the beach and addressed the first one with eager anxiety; and before long, a hasty little group had gathered buzzing about them, discussing with evident warmth some unknown question in which they all appeared to be profoundly interested.

'What's the matter?' Jocelyn cried, putting his head carelessly outside the lodging-house window. 'Something up? Going to get out the life-boat? Ship off the coast there in distress somewhere?'

One of the fishermen looked up to him with bronzed face turned pale as a woman's, and answered quickly:

'We ain't got no life-boat, more's the pity. I wish to God we'd only got one! Miss Maimie's out there.'

'Miss Maimie!' Jocelyn cried with sudden soberness. 'You don't mean to say she's off in that boat yonder?'

'Ay,' the man answered. 'Miss Maimie! It's Miss Maimie, God help her! She an' the Cap'n went out there sailing in the Cap'n's boat afore this 'ere squall that's coming drove over; and the coastguard can see they're in distress, and we're going to put off a boat to help 'em. God save the young lady, and send her safe to land, says all of us.'

Jocelyn Cipriani jumped up at once hurriedly from his chair.

'Hetty, Hetty!' he cried in eager haste, 'I must go too; I must go and help these men to save her.'

'But Jocelyn, my darling! the sea's so high. You don't understand boats—not in the sea, at least. You'd better leave it to the fishermen, hadn't you?'

'Pooh, pooh, Hetty!' the painter said laughingly, pinching her cheek to reassure her from her terror; 'the sea's nothing, absolutely nothing; and as to rowing, remember I rowed five in my college eight when I was at Oxford. I can pull in the sea as well as on a river. What are my arms for? We can't go and leave the rescue of poor Maimie all to

these rough ignorant fishermen fellows. If they're prepared to risk their lives for her, surely, Hetty, Pym and I should be.'

As he spoke, Adrian Pym came running down, hatless and pale, from the little hotel, and joined the band of talkers on the beach. They were pulling down a boat to the shelving shore now.

'I must go, Hetty,' Jocelyn cried hurriedly. 'If I don't go at once, they'll be off without me. Good-bye, darling; I mustn't wait a moment. For poor little Maimie's sake, Hetty; for poor little Maimie. We must try to save her.'

'Poor little soul!' Hetty thought to herself with clasped hands as he went. 'If she were to be drowned, though I've only known her for ten days, I should cry my eyes out. But I do wish Jocelyn hadn't gone, for all that. If he were to be drowned, that would be twenty times more terrible than anything.'

Meanwhile, Jocelyn had rushed down quickly to the beach, and with his easy air of authority and command had taken a seat and a stout oar in the little strong-built fishing-boat.

'You'll come too, Pym?' he cried, turning to Adrian; and Adrian, throwing off his flannel coat, and baring his great muscular arms to the elbow, jumped into the boat without a single word, and took a seat and an oar in front of him.

'Now then, you others, be quick, all of you!' Jocelyn shouted with the voice of a born commander. 'Fall into your places! That's right! Push her off, you there! and row for your lives, men, as hard as you can row her.'

They headed her with difficulty through the fierce breakers on the shallow bar, and got clear off at last with vigorous strokes into the trough of the billows. The men rowed as if for dear life, and Jocelyn put his whole strength into the oar he was wielding. As for Adrian Pym, he pulled away, silent and pale, and never uttered a single syllable.

'Miss Maimie, she didn't ought to have let herself go out in such weather as this,' one of the men said half inaudibly between the crash of the waves; 'but, there, she's a reg'lar

sailor's daughter, the young lady; she don't so much as know what fear is.'

'The Cap'n didn't ought to 'a took her out, either,' said another; 'but he were always a foolhardy old chap, the Cap'n. The Lord grant we may find her alive, though!'

'Why, Silbury wouldn't be nothing without Miss Maimie,' the first man muttered, as he pulled his stroke through the seething water. 'But, as I says, she don't so much as know what fear is. Though she's such a tender, gentle, smiling little thing as she is, the Cap'n's brought her up to fear nothink. They tells us he fears hisself neither God nor devil, an' he's brought Miss Maimie up quite similar.'

Even in the midst of that terrible storm, Jocelyn Cipriani couldn't help noticing to himself two things—first, that they all spoke throughout about saving Maimie and not the Captain; second, that even those grim seafaring men didn't seem at all disposed to visit upon the daughter the sins of the father in the matter of religion. They appeared to think that, theological opinion to the contrary notwithstanding, whatever Miss Maimie said was right, and whatever she did was beyond all possible question.

Adrian Pym alone worked on silently and eagerly with blanched and quivering lips, looking ahead every now and then in the direction of the tiny white sail on the horizon drifting away for ever in front of them.

They toiled on, saying little to one another, but leaning hard upon their oars, against the overpowering waves, for twenty minutes more; and gradually the lowered sail upon the sky-line grew nearer and nearer, though still at a painfully dangerous distance. They could see now that the waves were almost too much for the frail little pleasure-boat, ill adapted for so fierce a sea, and that the Captain had hard work to manage the scrap of sail which alone he dared keep up in the face of so sudden and so terrible a tempest.

'Put your backs into it, all of you!' Jocelyn Cipriani cried out above the roar of the wind, as he looked over his shoulder at the tossing little craft upon the crest of the billows; 'row, row—row for your lives, men! Another gust like that, and she'll founder as she stands. The sea'll swamp her. She can never live through it.'

They were a hundred yards off now from the boat, and could see the Captain standing up with the sheet in his hand, beckoning them eagerly to hurry forward, and Maimie, pale but not tremulous, sitting unmoved in the stern-seat and guiding the tiller-strings with careful hands, like one well accustomed to such pressing dangers.

'By Jove, she's a brave girl!' Jocelyn Cipriani cried out to Adrian. 'She's keeping her head to the wind like a born sailor. Row, row—row for your lives, men! and with God's help we shall still be in time to save them.'

Strange how even with the most irreligious of us, in times of great emotional excitement, the old mother-tongue of the emotions rises naturally to our lips and gives strength and vigour to our outbursts of feeling!

Next moment a white sheet of spray broke up against the broadside in a curling mass and hid the pleasure-boat entirely from their view for a single second. When it cleared away again the scudding water had run on fiercely on its course to leeward, and the one small sail was no longer visible anywhere before them.

'God help us, she's capsized!' cried one of the sailors, releasing his oar. 'Look at her—look at her! there she goes, drifting away bottom upwards. They've both gone down—they've both gone down in her! There's nothing to be done for it now, Mr. Cipriani, but to pick up the bodies.'

They pressed on wildly with redoubled energy towards the black hull bobbing up and down merrily on the treacherous water straight in front of them; and Jocelyn looked around with an eager glance on the seething black mass for any sign of a human head standing darkly up among the spray on the surface.

'See there—see there!' the sharpest-eyed among the fishermen cried again. 'There she goes! There she goes! Yon's Miss Maimie! That's her—that's her clinging to the boat there! The Lord be praised! We shall be in time to save her.'

'And the Captain?' Jocelyn asked in a breathless tone, looking anxiously before him.

'The Captain?' shouted back the fisherman above the roar of the waves, with the calmness of his kind. 'The

Captain feared neither God nor devil, and he's gone now where he'll have to face one or t'other; and the Lord be merciful to him now he's gone, for a kinder-hearted sailor nor a braver man never sailed the salt water!'

They drew alongside with care and difficulty, for the waves ran so high and broke so strong that it was hard indeed to pull near the wreck without dashing up against her side, and so crushing Maimie between the two boats. The beautiful girl clung there still, clutching with her hands the shattered timbers, and watching cool and fearless over the dashing waves the little band of approaching rescuers.

'Catch the oar, Maimie!' Adrian Pym called out in trembling accents broken with suspense and terror for her safety. 'Catch the oar, and cling to it for your life, child!'

Maimie turned skilfully, like a girl used to the water, from the floating hull, and balancing herself among the high billows with one hand still clasping it hard, reached out with the other for the dancing oar-blade Adrian held out to her.

'Mind; mind your head!' Jocelyn cried in terror; but Maimie let it pass over as she bobbed in true sailor fashion, and caught at the narrower handle dexterously with her left, so that they pulled her alongside without further difficulty.

The fishermen lifted her tenderly into the boat, all wet and dripping; and one of them placed her on the thwart beside him, putting his arm with rough kindliness around the pale and frightened girl. Maimie nestled close against him in her fear, like a chick against its mother, and then asked in a calm and perfectly collected tone:

'Where's papa, Mr. Cipriani?'

'We can't see him,' Jocelyn answered in as unconcerned a voice as possible. 'We were looking about for him, Maimie.'

'He isn't drowned!' Maimie cried out, terrified. 'Oh, Adrian, Adrian! Sam! Georgey! Don't tell me he's drowned! Don't say you can't see him!'

'I see him, miss,' one of the fishermen answered with unwonted tenderness. 'See, see, there he comes up! hard

a-port, all of you . . . Hold him out an oar. Catch it, sir—catch it!'

But the Captain neither answered nor tried to clutch at it. His white head moved up and down listlessly on the top of the wave, like the bobbing hull of the boat he had been sailing in.

'Catch him, Sam—there!' cried one of the fishermen, as they turned the bow towards the insensible body.

Sam reached out his hand and clutched the corpse by the white hair. They lifted it in, a heavy inert mass, and laid it down at the bottom of the boat in the stern by the rudder.

'Not dead! not dead!' Maimie cried, wringing her hands now in genuine alarm and grief and terror. 'Don't say he's dead, Sam! Oh, Adrian! oh, Georgey! oh, Mr. Cipriani! he's only insensible! Tell me, tell me, he's only insensible!'

'Hush, Maimie!' Jocelyn answered soothingly. 'We must first get back to the shore in safety. Then we may see what can be done to restore him. Meanwhile, sit still, and keep the boat straight. We shall have hard enough work to pull her back again in the teeth of such terrible driving weather.'

They rowed back silently, without another word, Maimie weeping with cold and terror, and crouching close between the fisherman's knees; the Captain's body lying wet and white on the bottom at the stern, and the men pulling hard for very life, and too full of their work to find time for talking. At last they reached the shelving shore, and with the aid of a rope flung to them from land managed to drive her safe through the terrific breakers. One minute more, and a crowd of women surrounded Maimie with tears and sympathy: and the men lifted up the Captain's body and carried it straight to the nearest house, which happened to be Jocelyn Cipriani's lodging.

About eleven o'clock, the doctor came down from the room where they had laid the corpse, and spoke low to Jocelyn Cipriani.

'No hope,' he said, 'no hope at all. He's stone-dead. Not a tremor of the heart, not a drop of blood moving. We've tried brandy and blankets and artificial respiration,

but it's no good. He seems to have got so much water down into his lungs that there's not the faintest chance of reviving him. I've had Maimie put to bed upstairs, and given her a good stiff dose of spirits. With care and attention she will be none the worse, I hope, for her wetting. Be very careful of her. All of us at Silbury are so fond and proud of her.'

CHAPTER IX.

ADRIAN CONFESSES.

NEXT morning, Adrian Pym came in early to see Jocelyn and Hetty.

'This is a very bad business, I find, Mrs. Cipriani,' he said with nervous hesitation, 'about poor little Maimie. Her father's dead; but that's not all. He was positively everybody and everything in the world to her. She has no aunts or uncles or other relations living, and she seems to be left entirely alone now, with nobody anywhere to receive her or take care of her. And what's worse, I hear the old gentleman lived entirely on his half-pay, and he leaves nothing behind him in the way of property but the furniture in the cottage for poor Maimie.'

'Well?' Hetty Cipriani inquired quietly.

'Well, what on earth is to become of the poor child?' Adrian asked in a tone of utter despondency.

'Why,' Hetty answered in the most business-like possible manner, 'this is not a time to stand on ceremony, is it, Mr. Pym? She'd better stop here with Jocelyn and me till after the funeral, and then come up to town and stay with us in Clevedon Place for the present. And as soon after as you decently can — of course it mustn't be for another month or two—you'd better marry her.'

'Better what?' Adrian Pym exclaimed, jumping up excitedly.

'Better marry her,' Hetty repeated with perfect feminine coolness. 'Yes, Mr. Pym; I said marry her. It's perfectly clear to me that you like her, and that she likes you, and so why on earth shouldn't you both be married at the earliest

opportunity? Oh no, I'm not at all afraid to say it: married, married, married, married. Last night's accident has made it imperative upon you.'

Adrian Pym, instead of answering, paced up and down the room moodily with his arms folded, and said nothing for several minutes. Hetty watched him, unable to conceive why the suggestion should move him so strangely. Then at last he turned round, like a frightened creature driven to bay, and answered in a cold and decisive voice:

'I cannot marry her; I won't marry her. No, Mrs. Cipriani, I can't marry her.'

'Then I think,' Hetty answered, flushing up angrily,—'you must excuse my saying so—I'm a woman, and I say what I feel—but I think you have treated her very cruelly.'

Adrian Pym paced up and down the room once more, and drew his hand across his face doubtfully. After two or three turns, he pulled himself up right in front of Hetty.

'Mrs. Cipriani,' he said, 'I did not mean ever to say this to anybody; but under the present circumstances, I'm compelled to trust you and Jocelyn. I say it to you in confidence, and I trust to your honour not to betray me. The circumstances have wrung it from me. There's no avoiding it. If things were as you imagine, your blame would be just. I should have only one course open before me. But things are not as you imagine—I cannot marry Maimie, because . . . I am already married to another woman.'

Hetty paused a second to take it fully in before she answered.

'Then I think,' she said at last very seriously, 'I think in that case, even more than before, that you have treated Maimie very, very cruelly.'

As for Jocelyn, he spoke not a word. His philosophy taught him that in such conditions the woman's cause might safely be left in the hands of a woman.

Adrian Pym, for his part, did not attempt to defend himself. He was too good a lawyer in principle not to know that a hopeless case is best trusted to the mercy of the jury.

'I have done wrong,' he said, flinging himself on the sofa

in an attitude of despair, 'terribly wrong. I know it. I acknowledge it. But who could help it, Mrs. Cipriani? Who on earth could help it? What man that saw her could ever help falling desperately in love with little Maimie?'

'Where is your wife?' Hetty asked sternly. 'Why have you left her? Why do you not acknowledge her?'

Adrian Pym saw with instinctive diplomacy that his best chance of forgiveness lay in blurting out at once in all its ugliness a full and frank confession of his past history.

'My wife,' he answered boldly and bitterly, 'is a miserable, abject, drunken creature. She was a barmaid once, when I first met her: I was a mere boy—an Oriel undergraduate—when I was fool enough to marry her. It was a boy's freak, a bit of childish folly; and for fifteen years I have paid for it dearly and atoned for it heavily. She had pink ribbons and pink cheeks when I knew her first, and I fancied I loved her: she has a draggled dress, and a bloated, swollen, drunkard's face now, Mrs. Cipriani, and I know I hate her. For fifteen years that woman has hung like a millstone about my neck, dragging me down perpetually to the uttermost depths of infamy and misery and blank despair. I have lived in constant fear that she would turn up somewhere, and maliciously expose me: I have bought her off from visiting me in my rooms at Oxford by eternal black-mail for ever increasing. She's a fiend, a devil, a woman-drunkard—and I don't know anything worse to say of anybody than what these words truly say of her. Tied to that creature irrevocably for life, and hating her for life with a deadly hatred, I came to Silbury with a reading-party five years ago . . . and met Maimie. She was a child of fifteen when I first saw her, and I liked her for her originality, her freshness, her unconventionality, her freedom. It is natural to an educated man, Mrs. Cipriani, to take pleasure in the society of refined women, rather than in the society of a drunken, bloated, slovenly ex-barmaid. Mrs. Pym's company is not congenial to me—even when she's sober. I liked Maimie, and I talked to her often. I came again and again to Silbury; but it was never my fault if she began to fall in love with me. I

always told her she mustn't love me: I always told her I couldn't marry her. Can you blame me if I came here over and over again, attracted by knowing I could always see her here? Isn't it natural that a man of refinement and education, who has once made such a terrible false step in life, should wish at least to pass as much of his time as he is able in the innocent company of pure and beautiful and cultivated women?'

'Let him alone, Hetty,' Jocelyn burst in, interposing between them. 'He has had his punishment. Like Cain's, it is greater than he can bear. Upon my soul, I'm sorry for him. A woman can't sympathize with him, I dare say, but a man can; and he's had his punishment, his full punishment. Don't be too hard upon him. What we have to do particularly now is to think of the future, and to settle what can be arranged for poor Maimie. If Adrian's married already, even though it be to an abject drunken creature, as he says, it's quite clear in the present state of British law that Maimie can't marry Adrian. For what we've got practically to consider now is, what to do for poor Maimie.'

'Does Maimie know this, Mr. Pym?' Hetty asked coldly.

'Maimie does know it,' Adrian Pym answered, perusing the carpet. 'I told her the whole story, as I have just told it to you, about a week ago.'

'And she said?'

Adrian hesitated.

'She said she would still like me to come to Silbury.'

'Mr. Pym,' Hetty said, 'I won't reproach you. I dare say you have suffered, and I dare say you have been tempted. Nobody can know except yourself how wrongly you may or may not have acted. But you must never come to Silbury again, and you must never again speak to Maimie. We will take her up with us to London—that I've decided. There I shall find some suitable husband among our own set for her. But this one thing I must insist upon. You have behaved very cruelly, and the only reparation you can make now is to go away at once, and never again see or speak to her.'

'I may stop till after the funeral, and say good-bye to her?' Adrian Pym suggested interrogatively.

'No,' Hetty answered, with unyielding firmness, putting

her little foot down decisively upon the carpet. 'You must go away without so much as seeing her. I am in place of a mother to her. She's in my charge now, and you must not come near her.'

Adrian Pym acquiesced in silence. He knew it was useless to argue the point with a woman when she assumes the imperative mood. 'After all,' he thought to himself bitterly, 'it is better so. No good could ever come of it to either of us. It would be difficult to know how to speak to her in her sorrow. And as soon as ever I get back to Oxford, why, then, of course, I can easily write to her.'

When Hetty told the fatherless girl a little later on that Adrian Pym had left Silbury suddenly, asking Hetty to say good-bye for him to Maimie, Maimie only let a few more tears fall from her poor red eyes, and murmured softly:

'I wish I could have seen him before he left. I should have liked, Hetty, to say good-bye to him, and to send my love to the dear little undergraduates. . . . But it doesn't matter. I shall see them all again next year. And of course Adrian will write to me from Oxford.'

CHAPTER X.

THE SCENE SHIFTS.

HETTY CIPRIANI soon found out that Maimie need be in no great difficulty as to the question of finding a temporary home, for the immediate present at least. The doctor's wife and the lawyer's wife fought eagerly with one another for the pleasure of taking her in while things were being settled. 'Everybody would always be so glad to have dear Maimie to stop in the house,' they said: 'she's so bright and lively and helpful; there's nobody like her;' and Jocelyn was of opinion it would be better to let her stop at King's Silbury for the next six weeks at any rate, till the first flush of her grief had worn off, and then to take her up to London for a long visit to his own house. 'The change will do her more good at the end of that time,' he said to Hetty; 'and

besides, what's the use of my trying to paint the girl while her eyes are as red as cherries with crying? In six weeks the novelty of London will bring her back to herself again, and you can prosecute your matrimonial designs against poor Chevenix's purse and happiness, Hetty, to your heart's content. You women regard a man with independent means, it seems, as a sort of undesignated endowment for the general benefit of your girl-acquaintances; and you dispose of his hand without consultation, as the king used to dispose of heiresses in the middle ages, by way of an agreeable present for any young person who happens to take your royal fancy. Well, anyhow, I hope you'll manage to find her a husband, I'm sure, little woman, since her face is her fortune, and a very poor one too, I'm afraid, in these degenerate workaday centuries.'

So in due time Maimie made her appearance in London, and was regularly installed as a permanent guest for an indefinite period in one of the best among Hetty Cipriani's spare bedrooms. The position might have greatly troubled some other girls, but it didn't in the least affect simple little Maimie's health or happiness. In all such matters she was a perfect child, and it never even seemed to occur to her that she had been left unprovided for, and would have to live henceforth, for the present at least, upon somebody else's unobtrusive charity. Everybody was very glad to take her in, she knew: and dear Hetty was a real darling; and the house—oh, the house was simply lovely, with its exquisite portières, and its draperies and hangings, and its pretty papers, and its Oriental pottery, and all the hundred and one artistic nick-nacks with which your modern painter loves to surround himself. Maimie had never seen such a house before in all her life; and she charmed Hetty by her unaffected and unfeigned admiration of every room and every object in it.

On the second morning after her visitor's arrival, Hetty happened to notice, when she came down to breakfast, a tiny envelope on Maimie's plate, bearing, to her great alarm, the Oxford post-mark.

'Not from Mr. Pym, I hope, Maimie?' she asked inquiringly.

'Oh dear, no, darling: this is from poor little Tom Enderby. He writes to me often.'

Hetty smiled. 'And who is poor little Tom Enderby?' she asked with some amusement.

'Oh, just one of the dear little undergraduates, don't you know. There were two of them down there dreadfully gone on me—I do love them so—Tom Enderby and Chester Bradshaw. They were always taking me out for walks at dear old Silbury, and talking so nicely to me, and saying such kind things, and making me such pretty, expensive presents.'

'But, my dear Maimie, don't you know you oughtn't to speak that way about young men, dearest? In London people wouldn't understand you. *I* understand you, of course, and I know it's only the innocence of your dear little heart; but other people, I assure you, would put a very different interpretation on it. I hope, Maimie, Mr. Pym doesn't write to you now, does he?'

Maimie always told the truth with perfect transparency. 'Oh yes, he does,' she answered candidly. 'He wrote to me every second day, almost, at Silbury, and I wrote back to him. I had a letter from him, in fact, the very day I came away to London,'

'But, my dear child,' Hetty said with a grave face, 'this is really very wrong of you. He told us himself he had let you know he was married already—most unhappily married.'

'So he did,' Maimie replied with perfect gravity. 'And I was so sorry, you see; for up to that very moment I always quite expected, Hetty, he would end by marrying me. It was such a disappointment I quite cried over it. But now I suppose I shall have to get married instead to little Tom Enderby; and I don't really love poor little Tom one half as much as I love Adrian. It's very provoking. I hate his being married: I wish I could marry him.'

Hetty laughed outright even in spite of herself.

'Oh, Maimie,' she cried, struggling to be severe, 'you really mustn't talk that way, you know, darling! You must look at things more properly and seriously. Marriage is a very solemn obligation, and you mustn't talk of it

as if it were just nothing. And, above all, you mustn't write to Mr. Pym any longer. It's so awfully wrong of you. You don't know how wicked it is.'

'Let her alone, Hetty,' Jocelyn Cipriani put in, looking up with a quiet smile from his morning paper. 'Let one soul upon this poor, sombre, grey, conventionalized world of ours remain free and original and unconventional. Don't try to mould our wayward little Maimie into the same vulgar stereotyped pattern as all the rest of us. Why do we all like her so? Because she's herself, and not some other person. Let her be herself still, and don't foolishly try to patch and alter her. You can't improve upon Nature, I promise you. Here we are, both falling in love with her for her sweet simplicity and her country charm: and what do we begin straightway to do?—to inoculate her forthwith with the baneful virus of London manners and London respectability. Aren't there enough respectables and to spare in the world already, I should like to know, that you want to spoil and deface this one little innocent unsophisticated piece of rustic ingenuousness? Thank your stars for having made her even as she is, Hetty, and don't go foolishly trying to make her into something different—something that would suit the vapid, insipid, banal taste of conventional society.'

Maimie stepped over lightly to the easy-chair where Jocelyn sat, and took his hand in hers with grateful affection.

'Isn't he a darling, Hetty?' she asked, in innocent admiration. 'Isn't he just delicious, and sweet, and lovely, and charming? He puts everything so nicely and so pleasantly, and makes one feel in such a splendid good humour with one's self somehow. And he never scolds; he never scolds either. Now, tell me, Hetty, does he ever scold you?'

'Never,' Hetty answered, moving over to her husband tenderly and printing a wifely kiss on his broad forehead.

'I should like to do that too, but I suppose I mustn't,' thought Maimie to herself.

'He's the best and dearest husband in all Christendom, Maimie. I only wish everybody else had got one just exactly like him.'

'So do I,' Maimie answered frankly; 'exactly like him. He's such a darling. So kind and sympathetic. Except Adrian, I never saw anybody anywhere in the world one-half so nice as Mr. Cipriani.'

'These mutual compliments begin to grow embarrassing,' Jocelyn murmured, jumping up from his easy-chair, and taking his seat at the head of the breakfast-table. 'Hetty, what's your programme for this morning? I'm going to let Maimie have one more holiday, to see the sights of this great metropolis before she takes seriously to the trade of model; and then to-morrow she must begin work in real earnest, and pose all morning for the Beatrice in costume for my great picture.—You'd better read up the whole story beforehand, by the way, Maimie; it makes you throw yourself into the character more fully: you'll find everything you need know about it in that book on the table there—skim it through this evening, there's a good girl—and also in Shelley's tragedy ("The Cenci," you know) which you can get on the poets' shelf in the library. What do you think you'd like to do with yourself, now, this morning?'

'I think, Hetty,' Maimie answered obliquely, 'if it's all the same to you, dear, I should like to go to Madame Tussaud's, and then to look again in the shop-windows down in Regent Street. They're so awfully lovely, you know, the windows, aren't they?'

Jocelyn laughed aloud a merry laugh.

'My dear child,' he said, 'it positively does one good to observe and admire your infantile freshness! Madame Tussaud's, she says: Madame Tussaud's for choice now! Talk about the irony of fate! Has it come to this, then, that the house of Cipriani is to pour forth its womankind in a formed body to drink in lessons of high art at Madame Tussaud's? Oh, infinite degradation of the human soul! David was perfectly right after all! The heart, the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.'

Maimie drew back a little alarmed. She didn't mind shocking Hetty: she always expected that with women as a matter of course; but she hoped she hadn't shocked Jocelyn Cipriani.

'I—I didn't know it was wicked,' she murmured aloud,

almost timidly 'I thought everybody went to Madame Tussaud's.'

'So they do,' Jocelyn replied lightly, 'and you can go if you like, Maimie. There you will see a vast number of interesting persons: Napoleon the Great and the late Mr. Peace; George Washington and the Brighton murderer; Charlotte Corday, that transcendental and sentimental criminal, sticking a pork-butcher's knife under the fifth rib of the amiable M. Marat in a discreetly covered sitz-bath; and her Most Gracious Majesty, the reigning Queen, in her state robes, surrounded by a touching domestic group of assorted little princes and princesses, all in their best bibs and tuckers.'

'I shall like that,' Maimie said simply.

'I've not the slightest doubt in the world you will,' Jocelyn answered with a smile. 'The unsophisticated human intellect always likes whatever it ought not to like, as duly noted in the Common Prayer Book. Go, then; go and be demoralized, Maimie. Sate yourself to the full with murderers and Czars and second-hand frippery. And, Hetty, mind you take a cab both ways, there's a dear girl, and have a proper lunch down in Regent Street. No buns and cups of tea at a confectioner's, mind, Maimie: the natural woman is prone to buns and bad confectionery: see that she goes to the Criterion comfortably, and has a nice cutlet and a glass of hock and a little light pastry to finish up with. Maimie 'll like to see the Criterion, too, Hetty: it'll be a new experience for her—and I shall stop at home and work hard at my immortal picture here, for both of you.'

'He *is* a darling!' Maimie cried again. 'How awfully kind he is! Hetty, I do think you're the very luckiest and happiest girl in all England.'

'I am indeed,' Hetty answered, smiling. 'You'd say so really, and know it too, if only you knew him as well as I do, Maimie.'

'There are few things nicer in life,' Jocelyn remarked philosophically, balancing a piece of devilled sardine on the end of his fork, 'than to sit at ease in one's own breakfast-room, and be liberally cracked up for an unlimited period by two of the prettiest and most agreeable women in all

England. You may go on as long as you like, both of you I'm not modest: I don't mind it, thank you. In fact, to tell you the plain truth, Hetty, I rather enjoy it.'

CHAPTER XI.

THE WHOLE DUTY OF A MODEL.

MAIMIE certainly made up to perfection as a Beatrice Cenci. Reclining lazily in Jocelyn Cipriani's antique Florentine easy-chair, with her crisp black locks lightly encircled by Guido's traditional white turban, and her face naturally assuming that placid smile of childish innocence which is inseparable from our mental concept of a Beatrice, she looked the character to the very life. Jocelyn was delighted with her. He poised her head gracefully on one side, half looking over the shapely glistening shoulder, first a little this way, then a little that way, and stepped back a pace or two each time he moved it to see how far the position suited the exigencies of his contemplated picture.

'Art is very exacting,' he said gaily, with an encouraging smile. 'If you want your face to be immortal, you know, Maimie, you must submit to a little penalty for immortality. After all, you buy it very cheap. A trifle more up, the chin—so; exactly. That will do admirably, Maimie.'

Maimie noticed in her simple infantile way that each time he poised her head afresh a little differently, he put his hands for a second on either plump soft cheek with a gentle pressure, and seemed in no hurry to remove them, either, before he had satisfied to the full the exacting requirements of his imperious art. In fact, he seemed to let them linger there almost unnecessarily. But Maimie didn't in the least resent this mute tribute to her feminine attractions: it wasn't in Maimie's nature, indeed, to repress homage. She merely smiled more graciously than ever, and looked even more absolutely like an innocent Beatrice than before.

At last Jocelyn had settled her pose entirely to his own satisfaction.

'Art is appeased,' he said with a graceful wave of his left hand. 'We may now proceed, Maimie, to the first study.

I'm going to knock off your head in the rough first, just to catch the general expression of the Beatrice. Now, Signorina Cenci, think of somebody very agreeable, and imagine he's saying such pretty things to you. . . . Think, for example, of Adrian Pym.'

Any other girl would have blushed and started at the unexpected allusion, but Maimie's colour never altered for a moment: only a brighter light gleamed one second in her big brown eyes, and the smile that played imperceptibly about the corners of her tiny mouth deepened a little till it broke openly into a sunny ripple.

'No, Mr. Cipriani,' she said demurely, 'I won't think of Adrian Pym. I'll think of you. You're a great deal handsomer, really, you know: and, besides, you're also a great deal nearer.'

'But you like him best,' Jocelyn suggested archly, with a stolen glance at her pretty features.

'No,' Maimie answered with charming candour. 'I like you best now, of course, because Adrian isn't here this minute, you see, to make love to me.'

Jocelyn laughed an unaffected laugh.

'Propinquity,' he said, beginning to sketch the outline of her head rapidly on his canvas, 'propinquity undoubtedly possesses distinct advantages. The comparative vividness of the actual impression outweighs the comparative faintness of the remembered one. It does considerable honour to your intelligence, however, that at your age, Maimie, you should rightly have apprehended that important pyschological truth. You display wisdom above your years. Let me see—so. A beautiful curve. By Jove, what a lovely sweep of shoulder! Excuse me, Signorina Cenci: professional admiration only. My trade, my trade. The artistic instinct overcomes the human. I am but a painter.'

'You needn't apologize,' Maimie answered, smiling once more a most delicious smile. 'I don't object to it. I rather like it, thank you.'

'Of course you do,' Jocelyn continued, deftly sweeping his pencil across the field for the contour of her shoulder. 'All women like admiration. But it's always well to pretend blindness, and apologize to them for too openly ad-

miring them. It saves their blushes, or, still better, summons them. . . . That is to say in certain instances. Some faces look prettiest blushing: yours, Maimie, looks best, I think, in unruffled innocence.'

He went on sketching in the outlines of the head and shoulders for some time longer, and then began catching the expression of the eyes and lips hastily on the centre of his canvas, with broad splashes of colour.

'For you, Signorina Cenci,' he explained currently as he went along, 'the great thing to be aimed at is the passing expression. I can paint the flesh-tones, and all the rest of it easily enough from you as a mere passive model any time afterwards: what is important at the very outset is to catch and fix that indescribable, inimitable baby-smile of yours, which is just about the most charming and original thing about you. I must catch it at once, or its delicate aroma will escape me unawares. Familiarity would too soon get rid of it. The first impression is the truest in that respect. It is evanescent, and must be fixed and crystallized forthwith, or it vanishes incontinently before you can seize it and fasten it on your canvas. Only the freshness of first impression could ever rightly interpret the perfect kissability of that pursy little mouth of yours.'

'What a funny man you are, and what funny things you say!' Maimie answered, her face lighting up visibly with pleasure, though her colour still remained unheightened. 'I never heard anybody before talk so queerly as you do—not even Adrian. I feel as if I ought to be dreadfully shocked at you. And yet somehow I'm not at all shocked at you, and I'm not at all shocked at Adrian either. Do all married men habitually make love to all the girls they come across, I wonder?'

'That entirely depends,' Jocelyn replied, with a jaunty wave of his patch-covered palette, 'on the prior question whether the girls they come across are worth making love to or otherwise. If they are, my own experience has certainly shown me that the men invariably proceed to make love to them. But then, I am only one among ten thousand — an insignificant unit of universal humanity. Some other men may possibly be more conventional and

respectable than I am.' Stroke, stroke—stroke, with a vigorous dab of the brush on the canvas. 'I have reason to believe that such is really the case.' Stroke again; this time delicately. 'I understand on good authority that many men are absolute milksops.'

'I don't like milksops,' Maimie said quietly, after a short pause.

'No women do; but most unfortunately, in nine cases out of ten, they have to put up with them for their whole lifetime. I'm afraid it must be admitted with sorrow that, as an eminent statistician has carefully calculated, about eighty-seven per cent. of male humanity belongs absolutely to the milksoppy section. Don't move your head, signorina. Restrain your emotions. The good sitter hears everything with absolute composure. Expressions of dissatisfaction or of approval are equally disagreeable to the ardent artist. Listen to him strictly as if you were a lay-figure, and he will endeavour to treat you in the same unceremonious fashion.'

'But I don't like to be treated like a lay-figure,' Maimie answered with spirit. 'I prefer to be recognised as a real live woman.'

Jocelyn smiled.

'There is no fear of my being over-slack in that particular form of recognition,' he answered, as he gave a fresh stroke or two to the pursed-up mouth. 'I am human, Maimie, very human. I can't for the life of me assume the proper professional attitude to a pretty sitter. I am compelled by an inner instinct to flirt with her—that is to say, when, like you, she is a reasonable creature and amenable to flirtation.'

'Upon my word, Mr. Cipriani, I never heard anybody before say such very audacious things as you do . . . But I like them, thank you; you needn't apologize.'

'That's because you've never before come among the emancipated,' Jocelyn said, taking stock carefully of the corners of her eyelids. 'We here in our set are all emancipated—thoroughly emancipated.'

'Emancipated from what?' Maimie asked curiously.

'From prejudices; from prejudices of all sorts. Social

prejudices, religious prejudices, ethical prejudices, personal prejudices, and the whole tribe of prejudices generally. We have got over them—the same as if they were measles and whooping-cough.'

'I don't think, Mr. Cipriani, I ever had any prejudices to begin with,' Maimie remarked thoughtfully after a short pause.

'I don't think you ever had, Maimie. So far as I can judge, you must have been born without them. There, you have the better of us, like Paul with the Roman captain.'

'I don't know the story,' Maimie answered with a bewildered look. 'Is it in Shakspeare? Tell it to me.'

Jocelyn laughed a musical ringing laugh.

'My dear child,' he said, 'you are positively too guileless, too unsophisticated for this wicked world of ours. Not know about Paul! Why, it's in the Bible. Have you never read the Bible? No; I thought not. The chief captain said to Paul, "Tell me, are you a Roman?" or words to that effect—I don't quote literally. Paul said, "To be sure I am." The chief captain remarked with a sigh, "With a great sum obtained I this freedom." And Paul answered promptly, "But I was born free." That's all, Maimie.'

'I don't see much point in the story,' Maimie said with a puzzled expression.

'Of course you don't, as you've never read the Bible. You ought to read it, though; it's the great storehouse of literary quotation and allusion. You don't know how much of modern literature and conversation is a sealed book to you if you've never read the Bible. But the point of this particular story lies, you see, as Captain Cuttle remarks, in the application thereof. With a great price—bitter experience—have we, the emancipated, obtained this freedom; but you, Maimie—you were born free.' And he sighed pensively.

'I think that's nicer,' Maimie said, turning her head a little.

'Hold your head still, you naughty girl, and think about the picture, not about the conversation. . . . No, think about Adrian Pym . . . or about me, my child, if you

prefer me. There; that's right—a capital look; not a movement of a muscle for worlds. Perfection! perfection! Of course, Maimie, it's much nicer. But how many of us have ever the chance of such congenital freedom? It's like being brought into the world heir to a dukedom. We common souls are born with the curse of slavery stamped deep upon us; and even if we cast off the chains themselves with hard struggles, we always feel in our heart of hearts as though our freedom were somehow in itself a crime and a wickedness. Whereas you, signorina, were born free—free and innocent. Like Eve in the garden, you are . . . natural . . . and not ashamed. You don't think your native feminine instincts are something to be repressed; something to be penitent for.'

'Who was Eve?' Maimie asked again with unruffled serenity.

'Eve! Eve!' Jocelyn cried, laughing outright, and waving his palette frantically. 'Oh, signorina, signorina, you will be the death of me! All my pretty Biblical parallels absolutely thrown away upon the child of nature! Such ignorance! Such depravity! This is too painful. So you've never heard of Adam and Eve! I'll tell you the story, then.'

He drew out from a portfolio in the corner of the room an engraving after Hans Makart's 'Paradise,' and laid it on an easel, a little on one side of her in the direction that he wished her eyes to go. Then, with his brush hard at work all the time on the vague patch of canvas, where a mouth and a smile and a pair of deep brown eyes were beginning to grow slowly into the form and colour of Maimie the Cenci, he rapidly ran over, in such quick poetical language as first suggested itself to him, a semi-Scriptural, semi-Miltonesque version of the legend of the creation. It was dreamy, pretty, tender, romantic—a dainty bit of colloquial word-painting, fleshed out and rendered thinkable for Maimie's mental vision by the audacious imaginings of the great untrammelled Viennese artist. And the story lost nothing in the telling either; Jocelyn Cipriani's eloquent eyes, and clear-cut lips, and Vandyke beard, all seemed instinct with wonderful animation as he told in hasty artistic

outline that old-world tale of pristine simplicity and virgin innocence.

'It was very pretty, Maimie,' he said with a sigh, as he finished the story; 'but in the end, you see, the serpent got the best of it; and we took to clothes, and civilization, and conventionalities, and learned to be ashamed of our natural forms and our natural impulses. Ah me! ah me! what a wicked serpent! What a chance for art if we were still in Paradise!'

'A very pretty story,' Maimie said, with her eyes still fixed pensively on Eve in the engraving; 'but do you think, Mr. Cipriani, it's really true?'

Jocelyn assumed a critical expression.

'Truth, Maimie,' he said in his mystifying manner, 'may be either objective or subjective. Those are two hard words you don't yet understand, and, indeed, I can pretty confidently predict you will never understand them. Your dear little head has no room in it for such philosophical subtleties and rubbish. Now, the story of Eve is not true, I venture to say, if we regard it objectively. That is to say, there was never really in actual life any lady of that particular name, bounded on the north by Gihon, on the south by Pison, on the east by Hiddekel, and on the west by Euphrates, or *vice versâ*—I forget the particulars. The episode of natural and picturesque innocence is true, not of Eve individually, but of primitive woman generically. There probably never was an Eve, viewed as a distinct historical character. Her existence has been completely exploded by Darwin, Colenso, Spencer, and others. But if we regard the question subjectively, from the point of view of myth and parable, Eve is a genuine and demonstrable reality. She stands for the pure and untampered instincts of natural womanhood—the simple, self-forgetting maiden and wife, unspoiled and unspotted by civilization. In that sense, Eve is absolutely real and undeniable:—you are she, Maimie.'

'I think I understand you, Mr. Cipriani.'

'I'm glad you do, Maimie, for I'm hanged if I rightly know whether I really understand myself, little woman. Your eyes are fatally inimical to consecutive thinking. I

trust, Mrs. Eve, you may never meet with that horrid serpent, to convert you to clothes, conventionality, and concealment of feelings. But don't call me "Mr. Cipriani." I call you Maimie: why can't you now, after so much acquaintance, call me Jocelyn, *tout court?*'

'Oh, Mr. Cipriani! I shouldn't like to, really. I like you very much, you know, and I think you very pleasant, and all that; but I can't call you by your Christian name. You are so much older than me, you see, to begin with.'

'Why fling that ugly disqualification in my teeth, Maimie? After all, we're not really so very far apart in age from one another. You are twenty; I'm thirty-five. One touch of nature, and, hi, presto! the fifteen years between us disappear as if by magic. Nature resides principally in the lips. Hold them up, so, Maimie, and see me touch them.'

Maimie held up her lips as he directed her, thinking for the moment it was part of her self-imposed duty as a model; but when Jocelyn bent his own face down tentatively to touch them, she drew hers away with a hasty gesture of complete surprise. Yet she drew away, not coquettishly or with affected coyness, but out of pure momentary indecision.

'I didn't know you meant that,' she said, half struggling. 'I thought you were posing me for the picture, Mr. Cipriani.'

Jocelyn threw back his face, and looked at her with quizzical sternness.

'I'm not going to kiss you if you hesitate and struggle and jig about like that, you know,' he said severely. 'A snatched kiss isn't worth the snatching, in my opinion. Only beginners care for such crudities. You get no satisfaction out of it. A man of experience takes his kisses peaceably or not at all. Hold your head still and hold your lips up just as I placed them, or I won't kiss you; and then, of course, you'll be sorry for it afterwards.'

'Indeed, indeed,' Maimie protested earnestly, like one who defends herself against a wicked accusation, 'I didn't mean to struggle and jig about, I assure you. I can't think why girls fight and hold their hands up, and make such a

fuss about being kissed, Mr. Cipriani. I can't think why they don't stand still and take it sedately. It's much nicer, I'm quite certain: I know, because I've tried with Adrian. Only, I didn't understand you were going to kiss me. If I had, I would have held my lips up quite properly. Look here, is that right now?' And she pursed up her two rosy-red lips before him in the most innocently sweet and kissable fashion.

Jocelyn leant over her and pressed his own lips against them hard and fervently.

The girl threw back her head and looked at him with languishing eyes as he withdrew his face and took up his brush again.

'You kiss very nicely,' she said simply, with a deep breath.

'Of course I do,' Jocelyn answered carelessly. 'Why shouldn't I? Heaven knows I've had lots of practice. There, stand so, Maimie. That'll do exactly. That's just what I wanted. I've caught the very expression now: the far-away melting Cenci look in the eyes and eyelids. For goodness' sake don't alter a tittle of it till I've put it as it stands fairly on the canvas.'

Maimie started with a burst of recognition.

'You don't mean to say you've been making love to me,' she cried, 'just to catch the expression you want for your picture! Why, you wicked, cold-blooded man, how can you ever be so deceitful?'

'Precisely what I have been doing,' Jocelyn answered, continuing with airy grace to sketch her. 'I won't pretend to conceal the fact from you. Transparent truthfulness is one of my most pleasing personal characteristics. You must remember that I am before everything an artist, and art demands of one these little temporary subterfuges. You look absolutely charming now, Maimie—absolutely charming!'

'But I prefer to be made love to on my own account, even by an artist,' Maimie pouted, half amused, and half indignant. 'I thought you were kissing me because you liked me.'

'So I do. I like you immensely. But sometimes I postpone my feelings to my art. Now, this time I shall kiss you

simply in my capacity as a man and a brother. So—there—that was even better, wasn't it, Maimie?'

Maimie closed her eyes dreamily for a moment.

'That was better,' she answered slowly. 'Thank you, Mr. Cipriani.'

'Mr. Cipriani again! This is too ridiculous! Why not Jocelyn? Didn't I tell you that with a single kiss the fifteen years between us would disappear as if by magic? And haven't they disappeared, Maimie? Aren't they clean gone and vanished? Look here, little one,' and he placed his arm tenderly round her waist, 'don't you feel now that we're only boy and girl together? A pair of simple, little idyllic lovers, talking nonsense to one another to our hearts' content beside the murmuring brooklet in some shadowy meadow? Call me by my name, call me so, Maimie,' he whispered softly now, with a tender pressure. 'The fifteen years are gone, you know, and we are boy and girl playing idly in dreamland together. Isn't it so?'

'Yes, Jocelyn.'

She said it slow and low, with her eyes shut, and her head thrown back in a dreamy attitude.

The painter covered her upturned throat at once with a quick shower of kisses, and caressed her face with his hands tenderly.

'That's right, little one,' he said; 'it isn't everybody that can succeed in making my heart beat nowadays, I can tell you. There, open your eyes: that's a lovely smile on your lips—absolutely lovely. I wouldn't miss catching that smile for the Presidentship of the Royal Academy, Signorina Beatrice.'

He spoke once more in his mocking tone, and began adding a few improving touches to the study on the easel. Just at that moment the door of the studio opened, and Hetty entered.

'You've come in the very nick of time, Hetty,' Maimie said quite naturally, still retaining the exact pose in which Jocelyn had that moment placed her. If you hadn't come in just then, I'm sure I don't know what might have happened. You can't think what dreadful things your husband's been saying to me. If I had any

capacity in me for being shocked, I'm sure he would have shocked me half a dozen times over. But unfortunately I'm afraid I was born without any.'

'Oh, he's a dreadful man!' Hetty cried with a laugh, pinching the young girl's plump round cheek a good hard pinch with sisterly fingers. 'He's always making open love before my very face to somebody or other, Maimie. But I don't mind him, and nobody else minds him either, because he never means it. It's only his way of making himself agreeable.'

'Then he understands the art very thoroughly,' Maimie replied, holding up her ripe lips for Hetty to kiss exactly as she had just held them up a few minutes before to Jocelyn: 'for he has been making himself most agreeable to me for the last hour or so, and I don't deny that he does it beautifully.'

'Oh, he's a darling!' Hetty answered enthusiastically, but with perfect simplicity, casting an admiring glance upon her handsome husband. 'He paints beautifully, and he talks beautifully, and he sings beautifully, and he dances beautifully, and he thinks beautifully, every thought that's in him.'

'And he makes love beautifully,' Maimie added unsuspiciously.

'Oh, and writes such lovely love-letters, Maimie,' Hetty went on with wifely ardour. 'I only wish he could once write you a love-letter, so that you might see how sweetly he does it! I keep them all wrapped up in tissue-paper in a box I've got upstairs in my cabinet.'

'Perhaps,' Jocelyn said, throwing his arm caressingly around his wife's neck with real tenderness, and printing a single soft little kiss on her white forehead, 'perhaps some day I shall write her one, Hetty: and by the way, darling, in that case it might save time and trouble if you looked out the best and nicest of those you've got upstairs in your box, and allowed me to copy it out for Maimie, with the necessary changes of name and circumstances. Very little really need be altered. Hearts and darts and smarts, and all the rest of it, remain perennially the same under all variations of sender or recipient.'

'Oh, you naughty, bad old cynic!' Hetty said with a sunny laugh. 'He's really not a quarter as wicked as he makes himself out to be, Maimie. You mustn't believe him when he pretends to wickedness. He's only a pretender: in reality, though he likes to pose for the *rôle* of the first villain, he's the dearest man, and the kindest pet, and the best husband in all England.'

'Quite true,' Jocelyn answered slowly, stroking his beard with contemplative complacency. 'I believe I am the very best husband in all England.'

'I believe he is,' Maimie answered, looking at him. 'I only wish I could get somebody exactly like him, eyes and mouth and beard and all, without one single ounce of difference.'

'I wish you could, Maimie,' Hetty replied, disengaging herself from her husband's arm that still lingered lovingly about her neck, and stepping over to put her own round Maimie's not too unsubstantial little waist. 'But you can't, darling. There are no more like him. Nature made him—I can't say the Italian for it, though Jocelyn can—and then broke the mould, I'm sure, Maimie. I only wish she had made two, so that you might have had the exact counterpart, darling.'

('I think I should like this one best,' Maimie murmured parenthetically and half inaudibly, in unconscious parody of Milton's Adam.)

'You're an admirable woman, Hetty,' her husband said, looking at her with unconcealed admiration. 'I do believe you haven't got a particle of jealousy in your whole composition. Jealousy is without any doubt the very worst and wickedest feeling in this whole bad and wicked world of ours. Most women would be jealous of my admiration of Maimie, and of Maimie's unconcealed predilection for me. But you're not, Hetty. You're just a jewel of a woman. I never met anybody so good and sweet and kind as you are.'

'Not even me?' Maimie inquired with childish face upturned to meet him.

Jocelyn laughed.

'Not even you,' he answered musically. 'No, Maimie,

you're a very nice pretty little girl, but you can't quite come up to my Hetty. Nobody on earth can come up to my Hetty. I never saw anybody like her. She doesn't know what jealousy is, Maimie.'

'That's because I'm so perfectly sure you love me devotedly, Jocelyn, and could never care for any other woman as you care for me, dear.'

'Quite true, Hetty,' Jocelyn said, kissing her tenderly. 'Quite true, and very penetrating and psychological and clever of you. See me kiss Maimie, now, and show off your absence of jealousy. There, Maimie; hold up your lips exactly as you did before that spoil-sport Hetty came in and so rudely interrupted us. Yes, that'll do. Thank you.'

'Oh, Jocelyn,' Hetty cried, drawing back in a little womanly horror. 'Do you think you ought to kiss her? for her own sake, I mean, of course, not for mine or yours. Don't you think it must be bad for her? Filling her head with all sorts of notions that oughtn't to be in it yet, you know, Jocelyn. An unmarried girl, and you a married man, too!'

Jocelyn made a pass or two with his palette gracefully.

'How very provoking of you, wifie,' he said, smiling, 'just at the very moment when I wanted to show off your virtues too! I can put no new notions into her head, bless you, Hetty darling!' and he drew his pretty little wife caressingly towards him. 'The notions have all been put there already by Adrian Pym and others. I am only sipping, like a wayward butterfly, at the blossom the busy bees have touched with their honey-gathering lips long before me. The flower has learnt already to distil nectar: I will teach it nothing new that can hurt it or wither it: I will only lightly taste its honey and admire its beautiful peach-coloured petals. You needn't be afraid, Hetty: I am a prudent Mentor. I will give her the very best advice that lies in my power.'

'And besides, Mrs. Cipriani,' Maimie put in softly, 'you needn't be in the least alarmed on my account. It won't do me the least harm. I like it, thank you.'

Jocelyn threw himself back with a face of profound

amusement on the studio sofa, and said slowly, as if thinking aloud:

'Was ever illuminate in this world more ridiculously situated between two *ingénues*—but *ingénues* with a difference—than I am this present minute! Both of them are the victims of the sweetest simplicity, and yet the two simplicities are not one simplicity, but two simplicities. The first is the simplicity of modern convention; the second is the simplicity of unsullied nature. The one imagines no evil; the other imagines it and sees no evil in it. 'Tis a charming idyl, and I'm loth to break in upon it. But, Signorina Beatrice—Miss Pristine Innocence—don't for a moment suppose you've finished your day's work as a painter's model. I mean to do a lot more to this precious study before lunch-time. Hetty darling — Mrs. Perfect Charity—for you think no evil—sit down there on the sofa and watch me paint her. You'll see in the end the very prettiest and sweetest face I ever painted. But no more foolish interruptions, if you please, Miss Maimie. They interfere with art—that is to say, with business. So understand clearly, Signorina Cenci, you're not to have another kiss on any pretence—not even for an expression—till after lunch-time.'

'You can't think how queer it is, Hetty,' Maimie murmured, as Jocelyn threw back her head into the proper attitude, with many loitering readjustments. 'He kisses me every now and again, on purpose to make me look like Beatrice: and then he goes off like a wretch of a common workman, and says he did it just for nothing but to catch the expression.'

'Does he?' Hetty asked uneasily. 'He's a consummate artist. But do you know, Jocelyn, I don't feel quite right in my mind about it. I'm not sure that you really ought to quite kiss her. But of course, darling, I'm so very stupid, and naturally you know best about it.'

'Of course he does, Hetty,' Maimie assented readily. 'And I assure you I don't in the least object to it. I never *could* see what there was to object to in kissing. Can you, Mr. Cipriani?'

'No more Mr. Cipriani-ing, if you please,' Jocelyn inter-

rupted from his easel opposite. 'We've agreed that you and I are to be Maimie and Jocelyn: just as Hetty's Hetty only to you, Maimie. The fifteen years—seven in Hetty's case—are hereby abolished. Henceforth, the supreme authority decrees, it shall be nothing but Maimie, Jocelyn, Hetty.'

'Won't that be nice, Hetty dear?' Maimie asked, looking at her affectionately.

'Very nice, darling,' Hetty replied, rising from the sofa, and printing a kiss on Maimie's forehead. 'We shall adopt you, Maimie, as one of the family. Let's be brothers and sisters, and then it'll be all right, you know, about the kissing—won't it, Jocelyn? You'll kiss her then just like a brother.'

Jocelyn nodded.

'Thank you,' Maimie answered, 'that's very nice of you. But if you please, Hetty, I think I like this way best.'

CHAPTER XII.

DYNAMITE OR LOVE?

A FEW days later, Sydney Chevenix came round to lunch at the Ciprianis'. Hetty had asked the young doctor, of course of malice prepense, on purpose to make him fall in love with Maimie. But, like a prudent woman, she had said nothing to Maimie about this fell design; she had merely mentioned to her little *protégée* in a casual way that Sydney was a very nice young man, and a cousin of hers, and rich too, and a distinguished Fellow of the Royal Society. She didn't know that Maimie had already heard all about him from Adrian Pym, and received a hint from that disinterested quarter as to his perfect eligibility.

Who shall say what it is in any individual case that makes just this particular man fall in love with just this particular woman, or *vice versâ*? Philosophers have reasoned, and analyzed, and refined, and disputed about it; poets have sung, and romancers have written; but nobody has yet done anything solid towards solving that central practical

mystery of our insignificant little existence. And surely any man would have said beforehand—with the glib assurance begotten of thoughtlessness and inexperience—that Sydney Chevenix was the very last person in the whole world to fall in love with Maimie Llewellyn. The psychologist knows otherwise: he knows at least quite enough to know that he knows absolutely nothing at all about it—that the working of personal preferences between man and woman in the individual case is utterly inscrutable.

As soon as Sydney came into the room, and was introduced to Maimie, Hetty's sharp womanly eyes noticed at once that he kept his own two firmly fixed on the pretty girl throughout the whole of luncheon. Hetty was pleased at this omen of triumph; for Sydney Chevenix usually passed in his own society as a sort of mitigated and colourless misogynist; that is to say, he was a man of scientific tastes and of deep feelings, who wasn't at all likely to fall in love with every girl he happened to come across, but having once found a woman he could love, would have loved her devotedly, ardently, passionately, with all the restrained and accumulated force of his earnest nature. And Hetty noted with feminine delight that Sydney seemed to be drinking in every thoughtless word uttered by Maimie as if it were the sentence of a veritable Portia, or the final deliverance of a Mrs. Somerville.

As for Maimie, she was brighter and livelier that morning than ever; and she played as obviously for Sydney's admiration as for every other man's she ever came across.

After luncheon, they strolled into the studio, that Sydney might see Maimie's face as Jocelyn had represented it in his pretty study for the great picture. Sydney admired it very much: it was admirable, admirable—as far as it had gone.

'But still, you know,' he ventured to suggest, with unwonted timidity, glancing from the portrait to the original nervously, 'it doesn't quite do Miss Llewellyn full justice. There's something about her expression, I fancy, Jocelyn—something a little ethereal, poetical, infantile almost—like some of your favourite early Italian Madonnas, I mean—that you don't seem to me to have quite caught so far in the

study. Still, it's a lovely picture—a beautiful picture—one of your very best, I think, my dear fellow.'

Jocelyn drew his easel and palette over, with a faint smile playing around his handsome mouth, and put a fresh piece of canvas upon the stocks before him.

'Stand over yonder, you three,' he said in an authoritative tone to Sydney Chevenix and the two women: 'I'm going to make a little hasty sketch of you now, just as you are, Sydney. Don't leave off talking or assume an attitude, or take any notice of me, please, in any way. You'll serve my purpose better, the more unconcerned you are. Just go on exactly as if you weren't having your portrait painted. There's an expression on your face at this precise moment that I want to catch before it passes off from it. There—that will do: so: so: go on talking, please: exactly: exactly.'

Maimie smiled as she recognised the meaning of it. A faint flush came over even Sydney Chevenix's clear-cut face. He fancied he knew in his own heart what the expression was that Jocelyn had noticed. He fancied he knew, and his heart throbbed the faster for it.

The painter went on painting for half an hour, while Sydney and Maimie, with Hetty beside them, stood talking about the ordinary nothings of society in the corner of the studio: and then Jocelyn said, with cheerful satisfaction:

'That'll do, thank you. I've got the exact idea I wanted. The sketch will be invaluable to me. It's the very point I was most in doubt about. Hetty, you and Maimie can go and put your hats on. I've ordered the carriage for half-past three, and we'll take a turn in the Park, presently.'

As soon as the two women were gone from the room, Sydney Chevenix came over at once towards Jocelyn Cipriani, with one hand twiddling his watch-chain nervously.

'Miss Llewellyn is a very beautiful girl, Jocelyn,' he said simply.

'You're no Columbus, my dear Sydney. You're not the first man, by a good many, who has made that easy discovery,' Jocelyn responded, smiling.

There was a long pause, and they both looked hard in

one another's faces. At last Sydney broke the silence again :

'Is Miss Llewellyn engaged, do you know?' he asked timidly.

'Maimie hasn't fully confided to me all her private love-affairs,' Jocelyn answered with a still more amused smile ; 'but without being a doctor like you, I think I may venture to say from my own diagnosis of her chief symptoms that I feel sure she isn't.'

Sydney Chevenix gave a sigh of relief. 'I'm glad to hear it,' he replied, with perfect frankness. He was far too honest-hearted ever to attempt concealing his feelings.

'Look here, Sydney,' Jocelyn went on, rolling himself a cigarette beside the unfinished study ; 'do you know what's the subject of this picture?'

'Hetty told me just now,' Sydney answered with some little hesitation.—'Guido falling in love with Beatrice in prison.'

'And do you know who's going to sit to me for Guido?'

'No; I haven't really the slightest conception.' But this was a subterfuge.

'Then I'll tell you. You are, Sydney. And the reason I wanted to catch your expression just this minute was simply this. I saw my Guido was falling in love with my Beatrice. Now first love is the very motive and keynote of the picture, so I was naturally anxious to photograph it in a hasty study before the expression melted away, perhaps for ever.'

They stood still once more and said nothing. Then, just as the two girls came down to rejoin them, Sydney whispered hastily in the painter's ear, 'Say nothing to Miss Llewellyn about it, I beg of you.'

'Certainly not,' Jocelyn answered ; 'you would naturally prefer to broach the subject on your own account. Most men do. But do you really suppose, my dear fellow, a woman doesn't notice all these things by instinct immediately? Before a woman's eyes, I know by old experience, the heart of man is perfectly translucent.'

'Well?' Jocelyn said inquiringly to Hetty, as soon as Sydney had left the house, 'what do you think of it?'

'Think!' Hetty said: 'why, for my part, Jocelyn, I think they're every bit as good as married!'

'That,' Jocelyn replied, 'is perhaps a fine example of feminine impetuosity: but he's certainly very hard hit with her—very hard hit indeed. . . . And Maimie?'

'Maimie, my dear, would fall in love, I'm afraid we must admit, with anybody on earth in the shape of a man who took the trouble to be decently polite to her for half an hour. And Sydney was more than polite: he was most marked in his attentions. He never once took his eyes off her all lunch-time.'

Every day, from that day forth, a little bouquet of rare hot-house flowers lay upon Maimie's plate at dinner, 'from Mr. Chevenix;' and almost every day Sydney himself was round at the Cipriani's on some real or fanciful errand, just to have a few minutes' conversation with Miss Llewellyn, much to the disgust of Stanislas Benyowski and the detriment of the scientific investigation of the nitrogen-compounds. The picture, indeed, he hailed with delight as a perfect god-send. Under any other circumstances he might have grudged the time he would have had to give to sitting to Jocelyn as a common model; but as it gave him abundant opportunities of seeing Maimie, why—for Maimie's sake he didn't grudge it.

'What do you think of him, Maimie?' Hetty asked with affected carelessness one evening, after about a fortnight's assiduous attention on Sydney's part.

'What do I think of him, Hetty?' Maimie answered with a frank smile of childish delight. 'I think his flowers are really beautiful: and he's quite handsome himself, too: and he's got such lovely hands and feet: and after Jocelyn, and Adrian, and little Tom Enderby, and the dear old undergraduates—I really think I begin to like him almost as much as anybody I've seen. But then, you know, of course, at Silbury, Hetty, I never had the chance of seeing very many people.'

And at that very moment, Sydney Chevenix was walking home by himself with a strange fluttering in his left breast, saying to his own heart as he went:

'It may be very presumptuous of me; I don't really know

whether I've got any right at all to think it or not—dear innocent little soul—but I certainly fancied to myself this afternoon that she seemed as if she was beginning to care a little bit for me. Beginning to care for me! Maimie, they call her,—Maimie, Maimie. What a sweet, innocent, apt little name for her that is now—Maimie! I only wish I could call her so to her face, just once, instead of always having to call her so stiffly, Miss Llewellyn! Maimie—Maimie—Maimie—Maimie. There's a sort of dainty music in the very name. If only you were mine—Maimie—Maimie!'

CHAPTER XIII.

INNOCENCE.

For a week or two Jocelyn painted away on alternate days at Maimie and at Sydney, and also flirted desperately in his own way in passing with his pretty sitter. And the longer he painted the deeper the flirtation went, till at last even unsuspicious little Hetty herself began to think the time had come for her to exert for once in her life a moral authority over her too philosophic and platonic husband.

'Jocelyn,' she said with a timid little look of wifely diffidence one morning after breakfast, as they sat alone in the breakfast-room, 'aren't you at all afraid in your own heart that you may perhaps be falling—just a wee bit—in love with Maimie?'

'In love with Maimie!' Jocelyn repeated aloud, looking down into her face in a bewildered fashion. 'In love with Maimie, Hetty! In love with Maimie!'

'Yes, darling,' his wife answered, taking his hand tenderly in hers. 'I meant what I said. In love with Maimie.'

Jocelyn hesitated and looked at her anxiously for half a second; then he answered in a dreamy unsuspicious voice:

'In love with Maimie? Why, of course I am, Hetty. I'm very much so, indeed. I'm falling head over ears in love with her.'

'Oh, Jocelyn!'

'It's quite true, Hetty. True, every word of it. I

thought, darling, you knew I was in love with her. I thought you understood all about it, and approved of it. You don't mind it surely, do you?'

Hetty looked at him with sudden irresolution. There never was anybody so entirely incomprehensible as dear Jocelyn.

'You're not in earnest,' she said eagerly. 'You don't think you're going to love her better than you love me, do you, darling?'

Jocelyn smiled a philosophic smile of pure tenderness, and drew her to him with a caressing gesture.

'Hetty,' he cried, pressing her to his side, 'my own darling wife, Hetty—my heart's pet—my pearl of women! you don't think, whatever happens, I could ever love anyone better than I love you, or half as well either, do you? You don't think I could ever let anybody put my Hetty's image out of its proper niche in the very core of my heart, do you? You're not jealous, are you, little woman? You're not so foolish and wicked, surely, as to go and be jealous of poor fatherless, motherless little Maimie?'

'Not jealous, Jocelyn,' Hetty answered with tears in her eyes, looking up dubiously and wonderingly with a remorseful sense of being very wicked. 'Not exactly what you call jealous, you know; but I don't quite like your positively loving her. I don't want you ever to love her better than you love me, I mean, darling.'

'I never will, Hetty.'

'Never?'

'Never, I promise you.'

There was a moment's pause; then Hetty began timidly again:

'But you do love her, Jocelyn? You said you loved her!'

'Yes, darling; dearly, devotedly. I love her certainly. Better than anybody else in the whole world except only you, Hetty.'

'Oh, Jocelyn!'

'You don't like it, Hetty? You don't want me to love her?'

'I—I don't mind your loving her, Jocelyn, of course . . .

if you want to; but I'm so afraid some day or other you may get to love her better than you do me, darling.'

Jocelyn unwound his arm gently from her slender waist and shoulder, and moved back half a pace to regard her with silent admiration, as if she were a model for a weeping Niobe.

'I haven't educated you quite as thoroughly as I thought I had, Hetty,' he said musingly. 'The old Adam comes out in you still, in spite of my training. It's too strong for my philosophy. That being so, I must beat a retreat. Hetty, you're crying, darling. Come here and lay your head upon my shoulder—on the sofa here; that's right, sweetest. Hetty, don't cry, my darling, my darling! I shall never make you cry again. I didn't know I was going to make you cry this time. For your sake, sooner than cause you a moment's discomfort, a moment's doubt, a moment's hesitation, I'll give up Maimie for ever and ever. I'll never say another word of love to her at any time in any way.'

Hetty nestled close upon her husband's shoulder as she was bid, and lay there for a minute or two sobbing timidly. Then she said:

'You really mean it, Jocelyn? You're not pretending, just to appease me?'

Jocelyn rose and glanced at her with unwonted quiet dignity.

'Hetty,' he said, 'my darling, listen to me. You must trust me. Whatever I have done, I have never deceived you. Whatever I do, I do openly. I am very, very fond of Maimie. I thought you knew I loved her, and didn't mind it. I thought you so thoroughly understood my transcendent love for you, and had so entirely eradicated from your whole nature that demon of jealousy—the worst legacy of our barbaric and savage ancestors—that you would wish me of your own accord to love wherever my instincts led me, and to do whatever my heart prompted me. But I see I was mistaken. I see I was too sanguine. A woman will be a woman still. Inherited nature has been too powerful for me. You are afraid and grieved because I love another girl. That is natural, quite natural; quite womanly and human; exactly what we have all always been accustomed to.. but not perhaps quite what I expected from you. Sweet-

heart, don't for a moment think I'm the least bit vexed at it. You are my angel, my love, my heart's darling. I wouldn't say a word to grieve you in any way. I love you as I never loved anyone before, and as I never shall love anyone after you. Sooner than cause you again another second of such discomfort as I've caused you to-day, I'll go at once to Maimie and tell her this moment we must break it all off to-day and for ever. I love her, Hetty—I mean, I loved her—very dearly. It will hurt her for me to say we must part; for she's very fond of me: in her innocent, fickle, shallow, little way, she loves me as much as ever she's able. But I love you so infinitely more than I love her, that sooner than let you for a minute doubt me, I'll make the sacrifice and break it off with her immediately. Kiss me, Hetty. I'm going this minute.'

'But, Jocelyn—wait a moment—will she be very sorry?'

'She will be very sorry. Of course she will. Nobody snaps off a love-affair suddenly without crying over it. Friendship you dissolve amicably at a moment's notice; but love you can only rupture with a terrible wrench that leaves your heart torn and bleeding. Don't you remember those words of Swinburne's:

> "Take hands and part with laughter:
> Touch lips and part with tears"?

Maimie and I have done more than take hands: we have touched lips, and we must pay the necessary penalty of our silly love-making.'

'But, Jocelyn, don't go. Wait a while and talk it over. Poor little Maimie! I don't want to make her miserable. I was only afraid that some day, you know, you might begin to love her better even than you do me, darling.'

Jocelyn turned and looked at her resolutely.

'I will go,' he said with much determination, though his voice faltered. 'Hetty, I love you with all my heart and all my soul and all my nature. The rest is only playing with love on the outer vestibule; my love for you is consuming and unquenchable. I shall never let any other woman, however dear to me, stand a moment in the way of your happiness. Kiss me, darling. I'm going to speak to her.'

'Not now, Jocelyn—not now,' Hetty cried, clinging to him passionately with sudden pity for her half-unconscious little rival. 'She'll be so sorry, so awfully angry with me. Wait awhile, and let us think it over.'

Jocelyn withdrew her arms once more with gentle force, and held his face down to hers tenderly.

'Kiss me, Hetty,' he said again in an authoritative voice. 'My mind is made up. You shall have no further cause for doubt or fear or pain or jealousy. Kiss me, little woman. It's all over.'

Hetty kissed him, trembling and wondering.

'Jocelyn,' she cried, 'I love you—I love you!'

'Not as well as I love you, darling,' the painter answered with a noiseless sigh, giving her hand a parting pressure, and turning quickly towards the studio door.

CHAPTER XIV.

OFF WITH THE OLD LOVE.

MAIMIE was waiting for him in the studio, dressed as usual in her Beatrice costume, and she held up her lips temptingly as he entered for her accustomed kiss of salutation. But Jocelyn waved her aside with his hand in an imperious mood, and motioned her into the chair, unkissed, with a grave face of stern virtue.

'What's the matter, Jocelyn?' Maimie asked, staring at him blankly with open eyes of childish astonishment. 'You look just for all the world as if you were angry with me. You've been talking to Hetty about me, I do believe. Why won't you kiss me, please, this morning?'

Jocelyn answered very gravely:

'Because I've just made up my mind never to kiss you again, Maimie. I've just made up my mind, my poor child, that it must be all over between us two henceforth and for ever.'

Maimie started, and looked up at him in haste with sudden surprise, as if she didn't fully take in at first the entire meaning of his novel resolution.

'Never kiss me again, Jocelyn!' she repeated with evident

bewilderment. 'All over between us two henceforth and for ever!'

'Yes,' Jocelyn answered stubbornly. 'I've been talking the matter over with Hetty, as you suppose, and from what she says I think it'll be better that we should part at once as soon as I've finished this morning's sitting. The picture 'll be done, then, you know, as far as your part in it's concerned: and then I think you'd better leave us, Maimie, and go back to the Johnsons at Silbury for the present.

'Leave you!' Maimie cried. 'Leave you, Jocelyn! Go away to the Johnsons! And never come back again!' The full meaning of those dreadful words seemed to be breaking in upon her slowly.

'Yes,' Jocelyn said with dogged persistence; 'never come back again. That is to say, you may come again if Hetty asks you, just as an ordinary formal visitor, but never again to be loved and petted as you've been petted this time.'

Maimie pursed her lips up temptingly, and turned her innocent face straight towards him.

'Kiss me, Jocelyn,' she said simply.

The greatest tactician on earth couldn't have suggested more perfect strategy, but Jocelyn refused with much spirit to be drawn from his position by the enemy's allurements. He shook his head in grave deprecation.

'No, no, Maimie,' he said with some sternness. 'I'm really in earnest. I mean what I say now. That's all over between us for ever. I shall never again kiss those lips, for all their tempting. I have promised Hetty, and I always keep a promise sacred.'

Maimie's eyes flashed fire for a second.

'Then Hetty *made* you promise!' she said with a malicious, taunting air.

Jocelyn corrected her calmly.

'Hetty didn't make me promise,' he said with slow dignity. 'I promised spontaneously, of my own accord. I saw she was grieved because I loved you, and I told her I wouldn't love you any longer.'

'And you won't, Jocelyn?'

'I won't, Maimie'

'You can't help it, Jocelyn.' And she bridled up. She seemed to call him by his Christian name each time on purpose.

'I can, Maimie. I'm not going to love you any longer. You've only seen me like clay in the hands of the potter hitherto, but, when I choose, I can be hard as adamant. Listen a minute, and I'll tell you why I can't love you.'

Maimie flung herself down with unstudied artistic carelessness in the studio chair, her beautiful arms disposed in her most taking natural attitude, and leant back to listen with half-pretended childish unconcern to Jocelyn Cipriani's promised explanation.

Then Jocelyn began, and told her exactly, word for word, what had just passed between himself and Hetty. He didn't alter or omit a single incident. He told it all precisely as it happened.

Maimie listened intently and wonderingly. At the end, she said with a reproachful look:

'And you meant it, Jocelyn?'

'Yes,' Jocelyn answered, hardly daring to look her straight in the face, 'I meant it, Maimie. I have begun to love you very dearly; but I love Hetty ten thousand times better, and I can do nothing that would ever cause her one moment's sorrow, for you or for anyone.'

Maimie paused and thought it all out by herself a little.

'Hetty doesn't want me to come here again?' she asked after a minute.

'Well, not exactly that, I think. She'll be very glad to see you always, Maimie; only you and I mustn't fall in love with one another any more, you see. It makes Hetty feel uncomfortable: and that's a thing I can never allow for anything or anybody.'

'Jocelyn!'

'Well?'

'What a pity you and I couldn't go away together from Hetty, and not let her bother you about me any longer. That would be very nice, wouldn't it?'

Jocelyn smiled curiously.

'Very nice indeed for you, Maimie,' he answered, looking deep into her childish eyes, 'but not perhaps quite so nice

for poor Hetty. It wouldn't be very pleasant for her, you see, to be abandoned and left poor and broken-hearted.'

'Well, but you're a great painter, you know, aren't you? and you get ever such heaps and heaps of money for just a little bit of a tiny picture. Hetty told me how much you got for that silly little thing of the two fisherwomen. You could easily earn enough for both of us, and you could send Hetty every month as much money as ever she wanted. And you and I could be so very, very happy together. I love you every bit as well as Adrian Pym—and better even.' The last words with a lingering cadence, slow and expressive.

Jocelyn's mouth curled up at the ends with philosophical amusement at her transparent simplicity. Did ever woman so let one look through and through the delicious frank selfishness of her unaffected woman's heart?

'No doubt,' he said, 'you and I could be very happy indeed together, Maimie, if there were no such person on earth as Hetty, and never had been. But you forget that Hetty possesses objective existence. She is there, an incontrovertible fact, visible and tangible, and you've got to reckon with her. Now, naturally, Hetty wouldn't like me to run away with another girl and leave her. I might send her ever and ever so much money, but that wouldn't be the same thing to her as if she had me myself always with her. Consider, for example, your own case. You wouldn't think it a matter of indifference, if I was married to you instead of to her, whether I always stayed at home with you, or went off with somebody else, and sent you a cheque every month regularly to carry on your housekeeping.'

'Certainly not,' Maimie answered promptly. 'I should much prefer to have you always with me, of course, Jocelyn.'

'Well, Hetty feels exactly the same in that matter as you do. She wants to have me always with her; and what's more, she wants to have my undivided affection. Very disagreeable for us, Maimie, but very natural and womanly in her for all that. You see, absurd as it seems to any rational creature, it's what women have always been accustomed to.'

'In England,' Maimie suggested gravely. 'Not everywhere.'

'In England,' Jocelyn repeated with a quiet smile. 'If we were in Turkey or in Salt Lake City, now, why then, things might perhaps be a little different, Maimie.'

'I wish to goodness we were!' Maimie ejaculated piously. 'I'm not at all like Hetty, Jocelyn. I shouldn't mind how many other girls you loved. I'm not the least bit jealous of her, I assure you.'

'You forget that Hetty has the prior claim,' Jocelyn put in, smiling still more unmistakably. 'She thinks she ought to be allowed undisputed possession of her own husband. And as law and custom go at present in England, we must both admit that she's fairly entitled to exclusive ownership.'

'Law, not custom,' Maimie said, turning her big brown eyes full upon him with unspeakable innocence.

Jocelyn started.

'Gracious heavens!' he said, 'she's not so guileless as she seems, after all! Is it worldly wisdom, I wonder, or is it only the supreme guilelessness that no amount of knowledge can possibly alter? You're an enigma after all, Maimie: transparent as you seem, you're nevertheless in the end an enigma.'

Maimie's answer was the same as before. She pursed up her lips, and said again enticingly:

'Kiss me, Jocelyn.'

But Jocelyn, as he himself had said, was like adamant now.

'No,' he answered, shaking his head gloomily. 'Never again; never again, Maimie.'

Then Maimie began to cry. It had come to tears. Jocelyn knew it would come to them, sooner or later. A woman's gamut runs always regularly down the self-same scale.

'Must I never love you any more, Jocelyn?' she asked piteously.

Jocelyn's natural instinct (not unshared by others of his sex) whenever he saw a woman crying was to put his arm gently around her waist, lay her head upon his broad

shoulder, and comfort her with little soothing speeches; but he resisted the virile impulse very manfully.

'You must never love me any more,' he echoed with unmoved determination.

'But I don't like it,' Maimie cried with a petulant dash of her little hand outward.

Jocelyn tried hard with himself to assume a becomingly brutal demeanour.

'In that case,' he answered doggedly, 'you will doubtless have the usual alternative of lumping it.'

'Jocelyn!'

'Yes.'

'That isn't yourself. You could never do so. That's that horrid Hetty!—I don't mean that. Dear old thing! I love her dearly. But it was she who told you to treat me this way.'

'No, she didn't. You're quite wrong, Maimie. She begged me not to. I determined to do it all of my own accord, because I didn't wish Hetty to be put to trouble.'

'Then you love her much better than you love me?'

'Ever so much better, Maimie. A thousand times better.'

Maimie went on crying silently for several minutes. Jocelyn pretended to busy himself meanwhile in an ineffectual way among his colours and palettes. At last Maimie spoke again.

'I don't want you to love me best,' she murmured, with childish petulance. 'I don't mind which of us you love best, not a little mite, I'm sure, Jocelyn; but I do want you to go on loving me. It's dreadful to think you should leave off loving me.'

'Nevertheless such must be the case,' Jocelyn answered with affected carelessness. 'You'll find plenty of other men ready to love you wherever you happen to go, Maimie.'

'I know that,' Maimie replied, wiping her eyes; 'but I want everybody everywhere to love me, Jocelyn. And I want them to go on loving me for ever and ever.'

'One love drives out another,' Jocelyn said sententiously

'Not with me, though, I'm certain.'

'Nor with me either,' Jocelyn replied, sighing.

Maimie caught at once at the sigh, as the proverbial drowning man clutches at a straw.

'It has been a very delightful little episode this, after all,' she said more naturally, smiling again upon him from her scarcely reddened eyes.

'Very, indeed,' Jocelyn answered, half relenting. 'I shall always look back upon it, Maimie, with intense pleasure. It has given me some of the purest thrills of genuine delight I have ever experienced in the whole course of a not entirely unimpassioned lifetime.'

'It has?' Maimie asked.

'It has. It will not any longer. No, no, Maimie: don't purse up your lips like that, I beg of you. Accept the inevitable, like a good girl. It's all over. No more of Eve in Eden for the future. This is the eminently respectable nineteenth century, and we must behave ourselves like civilized people, clothed and law-locked. Never again: never, never. After this morning's sitting, we must meet henceforth only on neutral ground in Hetty's drawing-room. And, Maimie, you must marry Sydney Chevenix.'

'Jocelyn, Jocelyn, I'll break it all off at once, if you wish me to: but oh, before we do, you'll give me just one more kiss, one nice kiss, as you always used to do! A farewell kiss, to break it all off with! You won't leave me here to die of hunger for it?'

Jocelyn was surprised at the momentary tone of passion which Maimie threw into her last appeal, for he had hardly suspected her of possessing even so much intensity of feeling or power of acting, he knew not which: but he answered coldly:

'No, no. If once I break my word, there'll be no drawing a line anywhere. The die is cast, Maimie, and we must both abide by it. Not even a farewell kiss to say good-bye with, dear little woman.'

Maimie flung herself back in the studio armchair in a despairing attitude, and sobbed away unchecked for some minutes.

As she lay there sobbing still, and shaking visibly, the portière moved aside with a quick movement, and Hetty entered.

'Oh, Jocelyn!' she cried, turning to her husband half reproachfully. 'What on earth have you been doing here, you dreadful creature? Have you set my dear little Maimie crying with your wicked scoldings?'

Maimie took down her hand from her face with a sudden burst of fresh emotion, and rushing up to Hetty in a fervour of gratitude, flung her arms wildly around her with unfeigned affection.

'You dear old thing!' she cried eagerly. 'I do love you! I do love you! Do you know what Jocelyn's been just saying? That he isn't going to love me any longer! And do you know why he's made me cry this minute? Because he won't even give me one farewell kiss to say good-bye with! Isn't it unkind of him?—oh, isn't it unkind of him? Hetty, you dear old darling Hetty, won't you ask him to give me just a farewell kiss to say good-bye with?'

Hetty's momentary pang of jealousy melted away at once before the sight of Maimie's innocent eyes of weeping entreaty and Jocelyn's comical austere look of unbending virtue.

'Jocelyn,' she said, taking her husband's arm tenderly, and leading Maimie right up in front of him, as if to present her in due form, 'do kiss her; dear little heart! Don't you see how dreadfully and cruelly you've frightened her? I want you to break it off, of course; but I don't want you to go and be a great, surly, cross old bear. Do kiss her just this once, there's a dear husband, because she wants you to.'

Maimie held up her tempting lips once more at the word, and pursed them into the most enticing shape as usual; but Jocelyn had fully made up his mind, and he wasn't to be lightly moved by this double entreaty from his settled purpose.

'No, no,' he said. 'Not even with two women down upon me at once. I shall never kiss her again, Hetty. What you said just now decided me forthwith and for ever on that point. I will never do anything as long as I live to give you one passing moment of reasonable pain. So I came straight in, as I said I would, and told Maimie all about it.'

'But I never said you were to make her cry!' Hetty answered, half frowning.

'I told you I must, though,' Jocelyn retorted, mixing his colours. 'As the French proverb justly remarks, without breaking of eggs there is no omelette.'

'Oh, Hetty, he's been so cruel to me,' Maimie cried, laying her head on Hetty's shoulder, and sobbing as bitterly as she could well manage. 'He said he'd never love me any longer, because you were getting a little jealous of me: and I said if you and he and I couldn't arrange to live happily together, all three of us, wouldn't it be better for him to take me away somewhere, and leave you to live here alone quite comfortably: and then Jocelyn said you wouldn't like that, because you'd like to have him always near you, and so we must leave off loving one another altogether: and I said, wouldn't he at least give me a farewell kiss to say good-bye with: and he wouldn't do even that, the horrid man; and that was what set me off crying and sobbing.'

Hetty smiled in spite of herself) though she *was* a little bit shocked) at the perfect *naïveté* of this candid confession; but she stroked Maimie's cheek none the less with her soft white hands, and whispered softly:

'I shall make him kiss you yet, Maimie.'

'Never!' Jocelyn answered, almost defiantly again. 'I'm very sorry to break off this pleasant friendship, Maimie—no, not that; for a friendship it shall be still: but to break off whatever in it was more than friendship. Kiss me, Hetty. That'll do, dear. Now pass on the kiss to Maimie. Good-bye, Maimie. Good-bye in your capacity of a thing lovable. Henceforth you are to be liked only. No, no, little wife: I am adamant, adamant. Don't plead for her, Hetty. You must do one thing or the other. As Maimie says, England or Constantinople. You elect for England. Then stand by your colours. I don't care for myself which you choose; but as the one clearly means happiness for you, and as the other means distrust and misery, I prefer to go for the one you have chosen. Now I shall go on painting Maimie. You must stop in the studio, Hetty, all

the morning, to see that Maimie behaves herself properly. She can't be trusted out of your presence.'

Maimie flung her arms fiercely round Hetty's neck once more, and kissed her over and over again with passionate kisses.

'You dear old thing,' she cried, 'you've tried your best to make him kiss me, but he's a horrid creature: I don't a bit love him. You darling Hetty, I do love you, I do love you. And now I shall marry Sydney Chevenix!'

'But perhaps,' Hetty suggested, 'he won't ask you.'

'My dear girl,' Maimie answered confidently, 'of course he'll ask me, if only I want him to. He's awfully in love with me as it is, already, and he's only waiting for a good opportunity.'

And then she threw herself back listlessly into the accustomed attitude, and became before another minute was over the careless, beautiful, thoughtless Beatrice of Jocelyn's imagination.

CHAPTER XV.

ON WITH THE NEW.

About three o'clock Sydney Chevenix called. Hetty was in, but she sent Maimie down alone to receive him, wondering much in her own heart at the same time whether she was doing right or not in sending her. What a terrible responsibility a matchmaker's is, and how lightly the best of women assume it!

Sydney rose, looking very embarrassed, as Maimie entered the drawing-room. He had a proposing air about him, Maimie fancied at once, and he held his hat in a proposing fashion; but instead of coming straight to the point, as Jocelyn would have done, or Adrian, or anybody, he went beating about the bush with the oddest possible nervous circumlocution, as if he was positively afraid of approaching the subject and saying outright, 'Maimie, I love you.' Maimie had never in her life met anyone so very queer as Sydney Chevenix. He seemed to be so awfully respectful

and chivalrous, and so dreadfully in love with her, and so kind and admiring; and yet he never even attempted to kiss her or to take her hand and squeeze it like other people. He called her 'Miss Llewellyn' with a lingering accent, as if she were a confirmed old maid, and spoke to her in a tender softened voice, but with a distant tone of awe and admiration. Maimie rather liked it by way of a change; it was a novelty to her — a perfect novelty. Sydney treated her just as if he thought her a regular prude, to be sure; but still there was a certain delicacy and refinement in his way of approaching her that flattered Maimie's undeveloped sense of personal importance. It was so very different from Tom Enderby and the dear little undergraduates down at Silbury.

As for Sydney, he sat there saying to himself:

'How am I ever to ask this bright, dainty, beautiful, pure-minded little soul to come and share my dry, dull scientific life with me? Can I ever hope to make her happy? Is she not too good, too innocent, too pure, too sweet for me? What presumptuousness on my part to venture on hoping that I can ever win her!'

So he talked long by roundabout ways about indifferent subjects, and touched upon the Academy, the Park, the season, the theatre, till Maimie almost began to think she must have been mistaken, and that the proposing look she had fancied on his face was really an error of diagnosis.

At last, however, Sydney touched, in passing, upon poetry. That, Maimie thought, was a promising turn for the conversation to have taken. Jocelyn and Adrian had often read her poetry—lovely bits out of Swinburne, and Rossetti, and Gautier, and so forth. Maimie was not insensible to the charms of verse. Like all other people of voluptuous natures, the mere roll and lilt of the metre carried her along with it on a vague flood of unspecialized emotion. The sensuous pleasure of the cunningly linked sound was to her the heart and soul and inner reality of the whole composition.

'After all, the loveliest lyric in English, Miss Llewellyn,' Sydney said with a touch of tremulousness in his voice as

he said it, 'is that piece of Shelley's, "One word is too often profaned." Of course you know it.'

'No, I don't,' Maimie answered with a sweet upward glance of confiding innocence. 'I've read nothing of Shelley's almost, except "Queen Mab," which papa used to make me learn by heart—for the sake of the theology, he said:

> "There is no God: infinity within,
> Infinity without, belie creation."

He used to make me repeat that every Sunday—as a creed, he called it. And then the "Cenci," which Jocelyn said I ought to read so as to throw myself better into the part of Beatrice. But I don't much care for the "Cenci," Mr. Cipriani; it's so very odd, and so hard to understand it. Do you know this other piece you're talking of by heart? I should so much like to hear you say it.'

('There's nothing like reciting poetry,' she thought parenthetically to herself, 'to draw men on. It's a perfect talisman. I've always noticed that whenever a man begins reading or reciting poetry to you, the very next thing he invariably does is to put his arm around your waist, or catch your hand in his, or try to kiss you, or something or other practical and nice of that sort.')

'Dear little innocent unsophisticated soul!' Sydney thought in his own heart ecstatically. 'To the pure all things are pure! She doesn't even know she oughtn't to tell me she's read the "Cenci"! I admire her above everything for that sweet childish outspoken guilelessness—that charity that thinketh no evil. She *shall* be mine, she *shall* be—she *shall* be! I *must* win her! I can't live without her. No other woman was ever made like her! The angel, the darling, the sweet little innocent unsullied angel!'

To the pure all things indeed are pure; and Sydney Chevenix with his ingrained purity read Maimie Llewellyn's character very differently from Adrian Pym or Jocelyn Cipriani.

'It's very short,' Sydney said, half apologetically, as a mature man always speaks of love verses; 'only two stanzas. I'll tell you them, if you like.'

And he leant over towards her with a timid yet eager earnestness, as he recited in a low impressive half-shamefaced fashion those well-known lines:

'One word is too often profaned
For me to profane it:
One feeling too falsely disdained
For thee to disdain it:
One hope is too like despair
For prudence to smother:
And Pity from thee more dear
Than THAT from another.

'I can give, not what men call love;
But wilt thou accept not
The worship the heart lifts above,
And the heavens reject not?
The desire of the moth for the star;
Of the night for the morrow;
The devotion to something afar
From the sphere of our sorrow?'

As he repeated the lines, with unexpected profundity of feeling, Maimie's eye looked deep and unabashed straight into his, a faint dew dimming tremulously their brilliant light, and a strange tenderness gleaming far down in the abysmal depths of their great black pupils.

'That's lovely,' she murmured in a low pensive tone. 'Exquisitely lovely. How very proud the girl must have been to whom a great poet like Shelley sent such a delicately chivalrous love-letter!'

Unconsciously to herself, she had half risen to the dignity of the situation, and, as often happens under such circumstances, spoke above her own normal level.

'Miss Llewellyn! Miss Llewellyn!' Sydney Chevenix exclaimed, leaning nearer and nearer to her, and stammering in his emotion, 'what would I not give if I were only a great poet, and could have written just such a beautiful poem as that to you . . . Maimie!'

Maimie drew back from him with a sudden dismay, as if half astonished, half frightened.

'Why, Mr. Chevenix,' she said timorously, 'I . . I didn't know you had any sorrow.'

'None,' Sydney cried, venturing to take her hand tenta-

tively in his; and she let him hold it—how gracious! how condescending! 'None but my isolation . . . And yet that I begin to feel is a heavy one. . . . Maimie, Maimie, from the moment I first saw you, I have always felt what those lines express . . . an infinite yearning after you, as towards a thing so far, far—far above me; a worship of your beauty, your purity, your holiness; a longing to do my best to make you happy. . . . Will you let me try, Maimie? Will you let me? Will you let me?'

Maimie answered never a word for good or for evil, but pressed his hand that grasped her own—pressed it faintly with maiden timidity. It was so very funny! He made such a fuss about it!

At the pressure, Sydney's heart came up into his mouth.

'My darling,' he cried, 'my heart's darling! Oh, thank you! Thank you! This is too much kindness of you! This is too much happiness! Can you love me, Maimie? Can you love me? Can you love me?'

And then—wondering strangely at his own audacity (but love supplies even a modest man with surprising boldness) he put his arm all trembling around her waist and drew her towards him, and kissed her twice, purely, rapturously.

Maimie, too, was very happy. It's so nice to feel you're actually settled; that a man you like and really care for has proposed outright for you in so many words and been fairly accepted.

So now she ventured to be gracious in return.

'Mr. Chevenix,' she murmured low in his ear, 'I am very happy. I do love you. I loved you from the first . . very dearly.'

And as she said it, she meant it truly. It was so easy for Maimie to fall in love with anybody.

But Sydney Chevenix, who had never known what it was to love in his life before—Sydney Chevenix was in a seventh heaven of ecstasy and fervour. He could have caught Maimie in his arms almost, and smothered her with kisses in the wildness of his joy, if Hetty had not deemed it prudent just about that time to rustle her dress ostentatiously upon the staircase before venturing to open the door of the drawing-room.

'Well, Maimie?' Hetty asked, with a meaning look in her matronly eyes, as soon as Sydney, hot and red-faced, had muttered his farewells and taken his departure. 'I need hardly ask you what about Sydney Chevenix?'

'Why, he's a dear fellow,' Maimie answered with a twinkling eye and a sisterly kiss. 'I declare, Hetty, he grows upon one the more one sees of him. Do you know what he's been doing here this afternoon? You'll never guess. Reciting poetry, Hetty! Now, you wouldn't have suspected an F.R.S. and authority on explosives of such a levity as being poetical, and romantic, and affectionate, would you?'

'And what did he ask you, Maimie?'

Maimie laughed.

'He asked me whether I'd let him try to make me happy.'

'And you answered?'

'Nothing, of course. I thought an answer would be very unimpressive. I just squeezed his hand for him a tiny bit, as much as to say I had no objection to his trying it if it pleased him; and then he set to work at once, kissing me so properly—not a bit like Jocelyn and Adrian: schoolboy kisses, you know, the same as the undergraduates'. And just as the thing was beginning to get really interesting and amusing the door opened—and in you walked, Hetty, to put an end to it all abruptly.'

'So then you've accepted him, dear?'

'Well, yes, I suppose I've accepted him. Of course I've accepted him. At any rate, I fully expect to get an awfully pretty engagement ring by this evening's post with a real diamond in it. But, oh, Hetty! you never saw anybody make love in all your life so curiously as Sydney! He seems as if he'd never done it to anybody before—as if he didn't know how you ought to do it! And he kisses—well, he kisses one, my dear, just like a woman.'

'Maimie, Maimie! I hope you love him. I hope you're not going to marry him now just for the sake of getting a home and an establishment.'

'Of course I love him, darling,' Maimie answered, laughing. 'I think him a dear, delightful old stupid. If I didn't

love him, Hetty, well, why on earth should I want to marry him? I could marry anybody else I wished to have if I liked, couldn't I?'

And Hetty, reflecting upon her little friend's brief career of universal conquest, overrunning the male world like a girlish Napoleon, confessed to herself with a sigh that after all Maimie was right, and she might take her pick among the marriageable m n, of all ages, ranks, and fortunes in this colourless latter-day realm of England. Why, not even dear Jocelyn was able to resist her!

CHAPTER XVI.

A BRITISH MATRON.

So in six weeks' time Maimie was married to Sydney Chevenix, stopping with the Ciprianis after all till the day of her wedding, and being given away in proper form by Jocelyn himself, at whose house the breakfast was duly celebrated. Hetty had interceded with her husband to let her remain, and Jocelyn, though he was adamant still to all Maimie's little personal blandishments, gave way reluctantly on this practical point, taking into consideration the very short time that had yet to elapse before the date of the wedding. For Sydney, when once the ice had been broken, became forthwith the most ardent and eager as well as the most chivalrous of lovers. There was no reason, he said, why they shouldn't be married as soon as ever Maimie's arrangements could conveniently be made; and Maimie herself, with maidenly demureness, gave way at once to his earnest pleading. Lovely as she always was, she never looked lovelier than on her wedding-day; and Sydney thought, as he gazed at his beautiful dainty little bride in her pretty white satin and long lace veil, he was the happiest man and the luckiest fellow in all England. Adrian Pym, in his rooms at Oxford, thought so too, that dull morning, and envied him sadly.

And Maimie's first few months of married life were really months of pure and unadulterated happiness. She liked Sydney, dear old Sydney! From the very first she

genuinely liked him; in her own way, indeed, she fancied she loved him. Sydney was so kind, and so generous, and so devoted; always ready to do anything on earth for her—even to leave his experiments in that horrid old laboratory whenever she asked him; and he seemed to think so much of her in every way, and to be very proud of her, and to love to show her off to all his frowsy, drowsy old friends and acquaintances. And then there was the house, the life, the society! Maimie had never seen anything like it. She jumped at once from the half-pay officer's tiny little cottage at King's Silbury to be mistress of a handsome London establishment, with servants of her own, and even a carriage, made much of in the world, and petted and flattered as she had always been, but by a far larger and wider set of admirers. Sydney's position was such a very good one—Fellow of the Royal Society, and a man of means and a buyer of pictures, and an authority upon explosives! They knew everybody worth knowing—the artistic set, and the literary set, and the scientific set, and some even of the great London Society itself, that spells its own name with a capital initial. Maimie had tickets for the Artists' Ball, and for the Royal Society's Conversazione, and for all the private views, and first nights, and big concerts, and semi-fashionable at-homes in all London. To the country-bred girl, whose only amusements till lately had been lawn-tennis at the doctor's and the Silbury regatta—to whom the coming of Adrian Pym and his ten undergraduates was the beginning of 'the season,' and their departure by train to Silbury Junction the tag end and final disruption of it—this wonderful new London life seemed, indeed, a sort of glorious, whirling, phantasmagoric paradise. It was like the Garden of Eden Jocelyn had described to her. She was too happy ever even to stop and reflect upon her own happiness: she was lifted into the seventh heaven of excitement, for a girl of her temperament; and she enjoyed it all with the full faculty for enjoyment of a natural, healthy, vigorous woman.

At her first dinner-party as mistress of Sydney Chevenix's house, she had a real live baronet (F.R.S.) to take her down on his arm to dinner, and a real live knight (R.A.) to

sit on her left hand in his inferior dignity! What would they say to it all at King's Silbury, she wondered; and how the nasty Rectory girls (whose papa objected on principle to their knowing the little heathen) would die of envy when they read about Lady So-and-so's at-home in her letter to the doctor's wife, her special friend there.

For even the women got on admirably with that dear little Mrs. Sydney Chevenix. As a rule, girls of Maimie's type are anything but favourites with married ladies: they are men's women, not women's women. But Maimie formed the inevitable exception to the broad rule, and for an excellent reason too. Instead of putting herself into open rivalry with the young girls, instead of seeming to bridle up at and resent the matronly criticism of the mammas and grandmammas, she met them always on their own ground with perfect frankness, perfect cordiality, perfect *naïveté*, and perfect submission, like one who is delighted to be taught better. 'Wrong, dear Lady So-and-so! You don't mean to say it? Is that wrong too? Oh, I'm so awfully glad to learn it. You know I'm only such a simple little ignorant country girl, and I never had a dear mother of my own to tell me anything.' What on earth could Lady So-and-so do in reply but stoop down and kiss the pretty little penitent like a second mother?

As for Sydney Chevenix, he was quite as happy in heaping up pleasures for dear Maimie as Maimie herself was in placidly accepting them. Hitherto he had been a man of one idea—the chemistry of explosives: now he had added to it another and still more overpowering pursuit—the pursuit of making Maimie happy. For Maimie's sake he would do anything.

Dear little soul! how utterly he loved her! Yes, yes; he could make her happy! Whatever she wished, he would do it at once for her. Even the explosives (though this with a sigh of regret)—even the explosives themselves should go to the wall if they interfered with Maimie's happiness. Body and soul, he had sunk himself in Maimie, and he loved her with a depth and intensity of passion which Maimie herself could never have comprehended or even fathomed.

One thing only troubled Maimie. From the very day of her marriage to Sydney Chevenix, Adrian Pym had ceased writing to her altogether. She mentioned this with some surprise to Hetty; but Hetty laughed at her, and said, 'Of course, dear,' in a way that made even Maimie feel she had somehow been expecting something very wicked and very ridiculous. 'You don't understand these things yet,' Hetty said laughingly; 'but now that you're married, you'll begin to understand them, I'm sure, Maimie, and you'll see that he naturally left off writing to you.'

Yet, for the life of her, Maimie couldn't imagine why he never sent her a single line; and she did so long to write frankly herself and ask him the reason. Still, Jocelyn had told her she mustn't, on any account, write to her Oxford friends after she was once married; and though Maimie was never quite sure about what Hetty said, she knew that Jocelyn's advice on matters of this sort was always sensible. There was no ridiculous conventional nonsense about it; he gave it solely from the point of view, as he himself observed, not of the categorical imperative, but of the empirical *ego*. Enlightened self-interest was the sole key-stone of his simple philosophical morality.

And, after all, dear old Sydney was a perfect old darling —so kind and generous to her, and so proud of her beauty— and what could she want more than to be comfortably married, and have a house of her own, and a real live baronet (F.R.S.) to take her down on his arm to dinner?

CHAPTER XVII.

MRS. ADRIAN PYM DROPS A CARD.

Some two or three months after Maimie's marriage, Adrian Pym sat alone by himself in his ground-floor rooms at St. Boniface College, hard at work upon the concluding chapters of his History of the Corcyrean Revolution. He sat at an old oak desk by the bay window overlooking the gardens, in a red velvet-cushioned study-chair, carved with the arms of the college and university by some forgotten handicraftsman of the Jacobean era. All the appointments of his sunny

rooms were redolent of lettered ease and latter-day culture. On the oaken wainscot of the panelled walls hung choice etchings after famous pictures by Burne Jones and Meissonier. The tiny mirrors of the Queen Anne overmantel reflected a few select pieces of Venetian glass and old Japanese turquoise vases. The carpetless floor was covered with dainty red-and-white Indian matting, relieved here and there by great splashes of mellow colour in the shape of antique oriental rugs. Even the faint perfume of stale tobacco that clung about the tawny Turkish curtains added its own appropriate item to the general effect; for it was the dying odour of a good cigar, the very best Havana that Bacon could furnish. Everything spoke the luxurious and self-indulgent literary don: the man who mingles the apolaustic worship of comfort and beauty with the more ancient enchorial Oxonian cult of pure learning.

As Adrian leaned back in his comfortable chair, and surveyed at his leisure, for the twentieth time, the much rewritten manuscript of that concluding paragraph for the admirable chapter on the Demos of Corcyra—a paragraph altered and twisted over and over again in every sentence to suit alike his fastidious ear and his exacting sense of literary fitness—a knock sounded loudly at the door of his rooms, and the under-porter entered in haste, looking a trifle confused and flustered.

'If you please, sir,' he said apologetically, holding the edge of the door in his left hand with a deprecating air of profuse humility, 'the head-porter he sent me up to tell you, sir, that there's a young person . . . leastways a female . . . that is to say, I mean, if you please, a lady, as would like to see you very particular, sir, as soon as is agreeable, if not inconvenient to you.'

'Where is she?' Adrian asked, rising from his desk, and pulling together his necktie and collar at the tiny mirror in the centre of the overmantel. (One never knows, when a lady is announced, whether she may not turn out, on further acquaintance, to be young and attractive.)

'She's at the lodge, sir,' the under-porter answered submissively. 'The head-porter, he wouldn't allow the young person . . . leastways the lady . . . to come into college until he heard direct from you, sir. The head-porter, he

says, if you please, sir, that the lady's drunk—that is to say, intoxicated.'

Adrian turned round fiercely to greet him. He knew in a moment who it was that had come thus unexpectedly to intrude her hateful presence upon him. 'So she has followed me up to Oxford at last,' he thought to himself bitterly; 'run me to earth in my own kennel.' That final disgrace was too horribly cutting.

'Did the young person give any name, Martin?' he asked aloud, in as unconcerned a voice as he could easily muster, keeping down his feelings with a supreme effort. 'Did she say on what business she wanted to see me?'

'If you please, sir,' the under-porter replied with tremulous servility, handing Adrian a dirty little square of crumpled cardboard, 'she said that that was her right name, and she asked me to give it you in your own hands for her card de visect, sir. And the head-porter, he said I must take it up to you at once, but must tell you the lady wasn't in a fit condition to be brought into college, owing to being drunk, sir.'

Adrian glanced mechanically with a supercilious eye at the dirty square of limp cardboard. Written upon it in a loose, scrawling, uneducated hand were the four terrible, damning words, 'Mrs. Adrian Pym, Hastings.'

The tutor crumpled up the card in the hollow of his palm, and flung it savagely with an oath into the empty fireplace.

'Show her up,' he said curtly. 'She's a drunken madwoman, Martin. I know who she is, and what business she's come upon. Show her up, both of you—at once, I tell you—you and the porter.'

Martin hesitated. 'If you please, sir,' he blurted out at last, after a moment's pause, 'the head-porter, he told me to tell you he couldn't admit a drunken female inside the college without a written order from you, sir.'

With unruffled gravity, Adrian sat soberly down at his old oak desk, and took out a sheet of college note-paper. Upon it he wrote two lines only: 'Admit the drunken female to my rooms. Adrian Pym, tutor.'

'Better here,' he muttered to himself in his utter despair, 'than down there brawling at the college-gate, before the

eyes of all those chattering jackanapes of undergraduates. She's come here in this state on purpose to sting and humiliate me, that fiend of a woman. Confound her!—confound her!'

'There,' he said, turning round his revolving chair, and handing the laconic order with a cynical smile to the frightened and deferential under-porter; 'show that to Boffin, and tell him I sent it. Then bring up the drunken female between you, will you, Martin?'

The under-porter grinned visibly, in spite of his awe, as he read the wording of that singular mandate, and went down the stairs hastily to carry his orders into execution. As for Adrian, he sat down once more at his desk, and pretended to be continuing his literary reflections on the Demos of Corcyra in the most unconcerned and unaffected attitude.

In a minute more, the door opened with a sudden push, and a woman of twenty-seven dashed into the study, closely followed by the two porters.

She was tall and bold-looking, a fine woman, or what had once passed as such, but with her face now bloated and unwholesome from much drink, and her hair carelessly fastened in loose plaits, which left many straggling pieces playing untidily about the corners of her shameless forehead. Her dress and bonnet were tawdry and by no means new, and there breathed about her whole appearance that general indescribable air of dirty finery which marks at once the drunken woman who has seen better days. Her face was flushed, and her manner excited; and the head-porter had rightly concluded, from a certain pervading perfume of juniper, that she had nerved herself up for the coming interview by the aid of that spirit which is popularly supposed to inspire Dutch courage. Yet she was far from hopelessly or helplessly drunk, and she walked into the room with some visible attempt at dignity of demeanour, as if anxious to keep up the credit of her name before the observant eyes of the two porters.

As she entered, she tried to rush up to Adrian, and kiss him openly, in full sight of the college servants. But Adrian, rightly interpreting her intentions at the first forward impulse, eluded her attack by a flank movement, and sub-

stituting a chair at the critical second, with a courteous wave of the hand compelled her to escape a tipsy collapse by seating herself in it, half against her will, with what dignity and grace she could manage to call up.

'You may go,' Adrian said in an authoritative voice to the two porters, before the strange woman had time to compromise him any further.

The two porters bowed and retired.

'Stay,' Adrian cried, running out after them hastily, on second thoughts, to the top of the stairs. 'If at the end of another fortnight, Boffin, I discover by close observation that neither of you two has said anything about this crazy woman to any of the other college servants, or anyone anywhere, I shall make you each a small present of five guineas.'

The head-porter bowed and smiled.

'Though, by the rules of the college,' he added, with an air of oily insinuation, 'I ought to have seven of 'em, sir, and three to go to the under-porter.'

Adrian Pym showed his teeth with an ugly smile.

'I make terms with no one,' he answered in a crisp tone. 'You know your wages. Go, and say nothing about it.'

The head-porter withdrew, grumbling and cringing. For pure unmixed essence of servility and cupidity, it may be safely asserted, there is no race in the whole world to equal your Oxford college servant.

Adrian went back quietly to his study. The strange woman sat there still on the chair to which he had gracefully motioned her. He sported his oak unostentatiously behind him—closed that great outer door which secures a man by established university etiquette from all untimely interference or irruption.

'Well, Mrs. Adrian Pym?' he remarked slowly, with ironical politeness, seating himself on the edge of a chair opposite her.

'Well, Adrian?' the bold-looking woman retorted saucily.

'To what do I owe the honour of this visit?'

The bold-looking woman laughed a boisterous laugh.

'You're very grand with me nowadays, Adrian,' she cried with forced merriment. 'You usen't to be so fine-spoken in the old days, when I was "dearest Bessie," and "darling

Bessie," and "my own heart's angel," and all that sort of thing. In those days you used to speak to me very different.'

The tutor twirled his thumbs reflectively.

'In those days, Mrs. Adrian Pym,' he said with official calmness, looking straight at her, 'you yourself had not developed all those peculiar and unpleasant tendencies which induce me now to treat you otherwise. We had our dream, Mrs. Adrian Pym: you had yours, and I had mine. Both were mistaken—yours as much as mine. We were a pair of idiots: we lived for a moment in a fool's paradise; by-and-by there came a sharp awakening; the paradise disappeared in the twinkling of an eye, and nothing remained but the pair of fools, who thought it best to part in the interests of harmony. I have never shown any disposition to disturb your retirement, Mrs. Adrian Pym: to what do I owe it that you have come now to disturb mine, madam?'

He spoke with a cruel provoking coolness which maddened and enraged the half-tipsy woman by its insolent air of superiority. There is nothing that violent people of the lower order detest so much as the presence of a calm and collected opponent. Passion they understand, vituperation they understand, and neither frightens them; but the perfectly unruffled superior anger of an educated man they cannot comprehend, and it drives them frantic.

'Adrian,' she cried, rising from her chair, and standing before him with an air that would have been absolutely tragic but for her unmistakably half-tipsy appearance, 'I am your wife! your wife! your wedded wife, you miserable wretch, you! How dare you treat me so? You hound! You cur! How dare you!—how dare you?'

'Sit down, Mrs. Adrian Pym,' the college tutor answered more calmly and superciliously than ever. 'I am aware that you are my wife, Mrs. Adrian Pym; I am not at all likely ever to forget that fact, to which you so superfluously call my attention. You have blighted and destroyed the whole value of life for me, but I am tied to you still—tied irrevocably. It must be a great consolation to you, Mrs. Adrian Pym, to reflect that you have got me indissolubly chained to you, willy, nilly, for good and ever!'

The woman sat down again angrily, as he bid her, in

impotent wrath, trembling all over; and, burying her face in her two hands, burst out at once into an uncontrollable flood of half-drunken tears.

'Mrs. Adrian Pym!' she cried petulantly. 'Mrs. Adrian Pym, indeed! That's what he calls his own wife nowadays! In the old days it used to be Bessie, darling Bessie.'

'I wish to God it were Bessie still!' her husband broke forth, with a gesture of impatience. 'I wish to God it were only Bessie, and that you were standing even yet behind the bar of the Royal, where I saw you first, and—pah! what a notion—fell in love with you! Fell in love with *you*, Mrs. Adrian Pym!—fell in love with you!'

As he spoke, he rose in disgust and lighted a little roll of *ruban de Bruges* that stood upon the mantelpiece, as if physically to fumigate the room from his haunting memory of that now impossible and inconceivable emotion. Incidentally, the smouldering perfume helped to fumigate it from the pervading suspicion of juniper also.

Bessie Pym sat there still, and rocked herself to and fro for some time longer, in a helpless, vacillating, undecided fashion; then she rose, and standing before him like a statue burst forth suddenly into a torrent of abuse and foul language, such as only a barmaid who has gone to the bad could ever manage to pour forth consecutively in a single flood of vulgar rhetoric. She called her husband by every disgusting and filthy name fished up from the profoundest abysses of the English language; she accused him of every impossible and unnatural crime known to the law or to the inflamed fancy of drunken costermongers; she reproached him with all that he had done and all that he had not done; with all that he was, and all that he was not; with everything on earth that a fertile imagination, not by any means unversed in male depravity, could suggest or conceive of filthy and evil.

Adrian, with his back turned carelessly to the fire, stood still and listened to her fluent language in apparent unconcern, twisting a cigarette around his delicate fingers meanwhile, and watching her livid swollen face with the closest and most painstaking philosophic attention. The wilder she grew, the cooler he appeared to become; and the cooler he became, the fiercer and hotter burned the woman's fury. It was a sort

of duel by contraries between those two, to see which could succeed best in his own character in out-brazening and shaming the other.

At last the woman's wrath wore itself out, of pure inanition, and she sank once more helplessly in the chair, for want of breath and lack of further vocabulary, rocking herself to and fro, as before, in the abject impotence of feminine anger.

Then Adrian Pym began quietly and dexterously to play his own part in the singular interview.

'Having relieved your mind of all these very choice expressions, Mrs. Adrian Pym,' he said calmly, 'perhaps you will now politely condescend to answer the question I first put to you. To what do I owe the honour of this visit?'

Bessie Pym rocked herself to and fro vehemently, and answered never a single word for good or for evil.

Adrian coughed drily, and began again.

'Direct examination having failed in its purpose,' he continued with unruffled composure, 'counsel must next have recourse, I suppose, to a leading question. Have you come, pray, for more money?'

The woman took down her hands from her face, and looking him boldly in the eyes, once more answered in an acrid voice:

'Partly for that, and partly for other things.'

'Let us begin first with partly for that,' the immovable husband retorted with inflexible placidity. 'If what you wanted to get was partly more money, Mrs. Adrian Pym, you might have written to me, and suggested a further allowance with due negotiations, instead of putting me to the indelible disgrace of having my name associated with yours—with yours, you drunken, dissolute, good-for-nothing woman! Why didn't you write, Mrs. Adrian Pym? Why didn't you write and propose it formally?'

'Haven't I always written, Adrian?' the woman cried angrily, with just a tinge of righteous indignation in her husky voice. 'Ain't I always writing and telling you I'm in want of money? Ain't I always asking you to send me a little something extra?'

Adrian smiled a smile of sardonic humour.

'I will do you the justice to admit, Mrs. Adrian Pym,' he

answered sarcastically, 'that your letters have often contained abundant remarks of the nature you are alluding to. But they have been merely vague and indefinite complaints of want of money, viewed in the abstract, which I know to be untrue, or at least unnecessary. They alleged no just or sufficient ground for increasing your allowance. Don't I allow you your stated three pounds a week, payable every Saturday, with the utmost regularity? and isn't that quite enough to keep you in all decent comfort and respectability, especially considering the class I originally took you from, my dear madam?'

The woman jumped up, with blazing eyes, like an angry tigress, as if she would leap upon him bodily at this gratuitous insult; but Adrian stood still so absolutely like a statue in front of the fireplace, cigarette in hand, that he disarmed her frenzy, and she sat down once more, flop in her chair, after a moment's indecision, moaning piteously.

Women of her sort, especially when they take to drinking, oscillate ridiculously in moments of emotion between extreme violence and tearful helplessness. Mrs. Adrian Pym was verging rapidly now on the latter condition.

'It isn't enough,' she cried, sobbing; 'three pound a week isn't enough; and you know very well yourself it isn't. A pretty way to keep your wife, Adrian. Here are you living in every luxury and every comfort,' and she glanced eloquently round that well-furnished room, 'while your poor wife, your lawful wife, that you promised to love, honour, and cherish, has hardly what'll buy her a decent bonnet to cover her head with. Ugh! you wretch, I hate you!—I hate you!'

'You may remember, Mrs. Adrian Pym,' the college tutor said in the self-same severely official manner, 'that you also at the time to which you so touchingly allude promised for your part to obey me as your lawful husband. I gave you orders not to quit Hastings without my permission. But you have chosen to break them. That makes the account clear between us. Now, setting aside vulgar recriminations, let us return to the simple and definite question of your present allowance. You haven't got enough to keep you, you say. I know why. Because you drink up all I give you. That's the reason, Mrs. Adrian Pym. Otherwise, three pounds a week

ought to be an ample allowance for a person of your natural rank in society.'

The woman broke down and sobbed again.

'Oh, Adrian!' she cried, 'you will kill me!—you will kill me! You can't think what a pain I have here in my side,' and she put her hand upon it with real emotion. 'It's killing me, Adrian; it's gnawing right into me. It's eating out my heart, little by little. I only drink to ease the pain, Adrian. It's only for that—only for that—I swear to you solemnly.'

A sudden gleam of interest lighted up Adrian Pym's impassive countenance for a single moment as she uttered those suggestive words with evident earnestness. He scrutinized his wife with a closer scrutiny.

'Ho!' he said; 'so you're in pain, are you? You suffer from a burning at your heart, do you? Show me the place the pain settles in, Bessie.' He called her for the first time by her Christian name, with some faint show of mollification in his softened tone. 'Is it here, or here, it catches you? Show me—show me; put your hand upon the exact spot.'

The woman placed her hand upon the right side, a little below the shorter ribs, with an unmistakable look of real pain upon her bloated features.

'Gin-drinker's liver, not a doubt about it!' Adrian Pym ejaculated to himself softly, with a look of triumph. Then he glanced in the glass for a moment with a curious air of indecision, as if he hesitated in his own mind what should be his next movement. The devil and whatever spark of conscience he had left in him were fighting hard within him for the mastery of his soul, that solitary minute of hesitation.

Next instant, the devil had fairly conquered, and the evil suggestion was immediately acted on.

'When you get the pain you speak of,' Adrian Pym went on, with a further softening of his hard voice, and a further faint show of personal interest, 'you find, do you, Bessie, that a little stimulant gives you some relief, at least for the time being?'

The wretched woman gasped shortly, and her eyes seemed to gleam with a strange longing.

'Yes, Adrian, yes,' she answered eagerly. 'It warms my

heart, dear; it makes me feel like my old self again—in the old days—you know, Adrian—when we went to the Isle of Wight together.'

Adrian gave a slight involuntary shudder, and then repressed it with an effort of will almost before his wife could so much as perceive it. He answered never a word, in speech at least, but going over to the little carved oak sideboard, he took out two pretty decorated Salviati decanters, and placed them with a couple of dainty old Dutch wine-glasses on the velvet-covered table by the low window.

'You are suffering now, I see, Bessie,' he said slowly. 'I don't want to be too hard upon you. You say wine relieves the pain for the moment. May I offer you a glass of sherry or claret?'

The miserable woman half rose in her eagerness from the chair she was sitting in, and answered huskily—for the sight of the drink had roused her unquenchable thirst afresh:

'Thank you kindly, dear, I'll take sherry by choice; but you don't happen to have about the place such a thing as a drop of gin, now, do you?'

Adrian's lip curled imperceptibly.

'I most unfortunately happen never to keep that particular spirit, Bessie,' he said with hardly concealed irony. 'But I do keep a little very good old French brandy—*fine champagne*, as they call it—the best distilled—a glass of which is entirely at your service. I'm sorry to hear you suffer so painfully.'

He poured her out a full wine-glassful of the pale, strong spirit, and handed it to her with an old-fashioned air of perfect courtesy. The woman took it, raised it to her lips, and saying mechanically, in the familiar phrase she had so often used in bygone days, 'Here's my love to you, my dear,' drained it off neat at a single gulp without a moment's faltering or hesitation. Adrian Pym looked at her across the brim curiously with a sinister look.

'Your love is easily purchased, it seems, Bessie,' he said bitterly. 'One can buy it back again with a single glass of old brandy.'

The woman wiped her mouth with her sleeve in haste, and then murmured in an apologetic tone:

'That warms my heart, Adrian: that seems to still me:

that takes away the pain a little, my dear. There's nothing does me so much good as a nice strong heating glass of neat spirits.'

Adrian Pym stood still and looked at her fixedly with a horribly cold and cynical smile playing upon his handsome classical features. For a minute or two he watched the woman, calm and remorseless, while the brandy mounted slowly to her face, and gave her for the time being fresh force and vigour after her hysterical sobbing. Then at last he said, as coldly as before, with the devil in his eyes as well as in his heart:

'Now, Bessie, we will return once more, if you please, to this unsettled question of your weekly allowance.'

The wife looked up and stared at him hard. She saw a mollified glitter in his eye.

'You're not so unkind after all as I thought you were, Adrian,' she said in quite a friendly tone. 'You'll let me have a little bit more, a few shillings more, just to keep me going, now won't you, dearie?'

Adrian winced a little at the hateful term of endearment, coming from that detestable woman—his wedded wife there; but he answered in the most conciliatory voice he could possibly summon:

'I don't want to be too hard upon you, I'm sure, Bessie. I'm anxious to allow you everything in my power, consistently with my keeping up my own position here, which you must be aware you've seriously compromised by coming to see me in such a plight this afternoon. First and before everything, you must solemnly promise me, then, that you will never come to Oxford again as long as you live unless I permit you.'

The woman, now softened and appeased by the reviving effect of the brandy, answered in quite a penitent and remorseful tone:

'I'll promise it, Adrian. I'll promise anything that'll satisfy you—anything in reason. I'm very sorry if I've annoyed you by coming.'

'Good,' her husband answered quietly. 'You have of course seriously annoyed me, and perhaps rendered my position here absolutely untenable by your crass folly. Still, I am willing to overlook it: I am willing to overlook it.

Now,' and he gazed at her very steadily in the face, 'if I allow you another pound a week, will you promise me, equally solemnly, that you won't spend a single penny of it in drink, beyond the amount you are already accustomed to spend on that article—gin or its equivalent?'

His eyes were fixed sternly upon hers. She quailed for a moment before that steady, cold, unwavering gaze, and then faltered a little.

'I'll promise,' she said, stammering, and turning away her eyes uneasily from his glance, 'not to spend a penny more on drink, Adrian, than I do at present.'

A gleam of triumph burned brightly for a second in Adrian Pym's cold grey eyes. He knew from her manner that the woman was lying to him.

'She'll spend it every penny on gin,' he said to himself, with a fierce pleasure in the horrid expectation. 'Never mind! she'll only die the quicker and the surer for it. And besides, I've relieved my conscience—if I have any—by making her promise me. What more can any man do after all than exact a promise, leaving it to others to keep it or break it?'

'Then henceforth,' he said aloud, in a very slow and deliberate manner, 'I'll allow you another pound a week, Bessie, for your personal expenses.'

'Thank you, Adrian,' the miserable creature cried, in an access now of drunken gratitude. 'That's my own dear boy again, that used to love me in the old time—in the old time, you remember, Adrian. Let me give you a kiss for that! Let me give you a kiss for that, dearie!' And she took a couple of steps nearer him, with bloated lips outstretched as if to entice him.

Adrian drew back from her offered embrace with a gesture of horror.

'Never, Mrs. Adrian Pym!' he cried, recoiling. 'All that is over long ago between us! Go back to your own place whence you came—with your pittance of money! You have got what you came for, hunting me down here and wringing it from me by coarse intimidation, to my disgrace and humiliation! Let that suffice you! Be grateful for what you have got. Ask for no more. Go back with your money!'

At the words, the woman sank once more into her chair sobbing like a child, with a fresh outburst of hysterical crying.

Adrian watched her a few minutes from above in stealthy silence, and then poured her out another brimming glassful of neat brandy.

'There, there, Bessie,' he said soothingly, as one who pets a naughty child, though without touching her or approaching her closely; 'don't break down: it'll only complicate matters. Keep up, keep up, whatever you do. Here, drink this off at once, I advise you. It does you more good than anything, you know. You're weak and shattered, and you want supporting.'

The bloated lips opened mechanically, and the red hands raised the glass instinctively up to the mouth, as if by some unconscious automatic action.

Adrian smiled an ugly smile of terrible significance. She was getting stupidly drunk now. The liquor was muddling her. It was a horrible thing to have to do; a man of Adrian Pym's sensibility shrank from it like poison; but it was the only possible way of getting rid of that atrocious woman in reasonable safety. He let her head drop heavy upon the chair; then he lifted her up carefully in his arms—ugh! the hideous burden—and laid her down like a log of wood upon the Jacobean sofa. After that, he watched her sleeping her drunken sleep very heavily, with a kind of horrible gloating satisfaction.

The afternoon wore away slowly, and hall-time came, and the bell rang to summon the college down to dinner. But still Adrian Pym kept his oak sported, and gave no sign of life in any way, merely watching the drunken woman with profound interest. At last he rose, as the shades came on, and brewed himself a cup of tea, which he drank composedly with a dry biscuit. Evening drew on apace, and the Fellows' Garden was now shrouded in darkness. Then at length Adrian Pym walked away softly, opened the door and locked it after him, and went down to the porters' lodge.

'Martin and Boffin,' he said quietly, 'I want you to help me a little further. Martin, go and get me a hansom, to meet me directly round at the garden gate. Boffin, you come into

my rooms. We must lift this crazy drunken woman out of the window, and carry her down across the back lawn to meet the hansom.'

In three minutes more, those two men, master and servant, had carried Mrs. Adrian Pym between them out to the garden wicket, across the Fellows' Lawn, and safely deposited her in the hansom at the back gate beside her husband.

'Where shall I drive, sir?' the cabman asked, in silent wonder at this strange proceeding.

'Drive to Abingdon, Aylesbury, Thame, anywhere,' Adrian Pym answered with a savage outbreak. 'Drive to the devil, if you choose to go there, fellow. Drive wherever you like, and however you like, as long as you only keep me moving, and let the air get at this wretched creature's stupid face to wake her up again. Thank God it's raining. That'll sober her the quicker. As soon as she's fit to be put into a railway train, I'll pack her off, with money in her pocket, to go her own way straight off to perdition. Drive, drive, drive, for your life, fellow, and don't stop for God or devil till I tell you to drop us. Anywhere in the world, away from Oxford.'

CHAPTER XVIII.

A SPOT OF BLOOD.

'Well, Maimie,' Sydney said to his pretty little wife one morning at lunch a few months after their marriage, 'how far have you got with the Bible now, darling? I hope you still go on regularly reading it.'

'Oh, yes!' Maimie answered, helping herself as she spoke to a chicken cutlet; 'I'm going along swimmingly, thank you—getting through it splendidly. I've read now as far as where a young man called David has a fight with a very great and terrible giant—oh, such a monstrous one!—and kills him with a stone from a simple sling in the middle of his forehead. It's very curious how, in all these stories, the big boastful giant invariably gets killed by somebody ever so much smaller than himself, but cunninger and wiser. The people seem to have a sort of grudge somehow against the

great silly giants. I always read two or three chapters every morning, as you told me, Sydney.'

'Well, and what do you think of it, darling, as far as you've gone?'

Maimie poised a morsel on her fork and assumed forthwith a critical air of candid consideration.

'I like it,' she said, 'in its own way—that is, I mean, Sydney, it's amusing, of course, but just a little wee bit childish: very much like the "Arabian Nights," in fact, only not perhaps quite so full of genii and wonders. Especially that part about Joseph and his brothers, you know, and the story of how those people went out of Egypt across the dry land, where the sea rose up as soon as they were passed and drowned the Egyptian king with all his followers. I thought that part awfully interesting.'

'Well, you must read it all right through, Maimie, and try to remember it; for it's an integral part of English literature and all other literature into the bargain. Without it, half of what you read everywhere must be a sealed book and a perfect enigma to you. It's the key to the poetry of all nations and all ages.'

'So Jocelyn told me,' Maimie answered demurely. 'He said I ought to read it for the sake of the allusions. And, indeed, I begin to find that much out for myself already. Lots of proverbs and common sayings that I never really knew the meaning of before, nor where they came from, are beginning now to have a new sense for me. For instance, I never knew in the least why people used to say to me when I was a child, "Miss Maimie, you're enough to try the patience of Job": and I often wondered who on earth Job could be, and why he was so patient; but I never knew till I saw his name the other day at the head of one of the little parts, don't you know, and I read all about him, and found out he was a man who got dreadfully ill, and never complained, but bore it beautifully. I think it's all a very interesting book indeed; but, of course, I can't remember just at first all the names of the different characters always.'

'You must read it and re-read it,' Sydney said encouragingly. 'Search the Scriptures, Maimie. Search the Scriptures. It was the greatest mistake your poor father

ever made in your generally admirable education, his not allowing you to read the Bible. Otherwise, Maimie,' and he glanced at the smiling little face affectionately, 'why, I think, darling, he made you just a perfect little woman.'

Maimie bowed her wifely acknowledgments with a face lighted up by genuine pleasure. What a dear old fellow he was, really!

'Oh, by-the-way, Sydney dear,' she said abruptly, 'a girl's coming to-day about the cook's place, you know. How much do you think I ought to say we'll pay her, darling?'

'Anything you like, Maimie. It doesn't matter to me twopence. Only get a girl you can be thoroughly comfortable with. If you're contented, that's all I care about.'

Maimie smiled her sweetest smile.

'You darling old husband!' she said affectionately. 'I do really love you! I'm sure I love you! I wasn't quite certain about it at first, but now I'm confident of it. I declare, Sydney, I believe I love you a great deal better than any other man I've ever met with!'

Sydney's mouth curled comically.

'You absurd little pet,' he answered, rising and kissing her; 'if any other woman on earth but you, darling, said such a thing as that to her own husband, it would merely be a grotesque platitude; but somehow or other with you, Maimie, one feels as if you really meant it—and as if it were a sort of tribute, too, to one's own distinct personal lovability.'

Maimie nodded her small head sapiently.

'I *do* mean it,' she replied, with a winning little look. 'And it *is* a tribute to your personal lovability, I'm sure, Sydney, for I've met ever so many nice men in my time, of course—and flirted with them desperately, too, I can tell you—Jocelyn Cipriani, and Adrian Pym, and little Tom Enderby, and I'm sure I can't count up for you how many others. Adrian Pym told me once I wasn't to waste my time, and I took his advice and never wasted it.'

Sydney pressed her hand tenderly.

'Sweet little innocence!' he said, with an admiring glance. 'I love to hear you talk of your simple, small, girlish flirtatations as if they had been such dreadfully serious grand passions. You're a child, Maimie—a perfect child; and I

suppose that's why a man like myself, immersed in dynamite and nitro-glycerine and chemical formulas, can love you a thousand times better after all than he could ever love one of these great newfangled learned ladies. They'd drive me wild with their views and their opinions—the unspeakable creatures!—men in everything except virility, with their feminine shrieks and fads and fancies. Whereas *you*, Maimie'—a tender caress on his broad shoulder did duty elliptically for the rest of the sentence. 'And now, my pet, I must be off to the laboratory, for Benyowski's waiting to go out to lunch: we've got a most important experiment on hand which mustn't be left alone by itself for a single moment. If it was, it would probably blow the house down in ten minutes.'

'If you please, ma'am,' the parlour-maid interrupted, coming in suddenly, 'a young person of the name of Hannah Gowland would like to see you. I've showed her into the library, ma'am. She says she's come in answer to the advertisement.'

Maimie ran lightly on tiptoe, as was her wont, into the library. A tall, pale, fragile-looking girl, dressed in black, with a bright red spot in the centre of each cheek, was sitting, after the manner of servants coming on approval, at the very edge of the stiffest and most uncomfortable chair in the whole room.

'Good-morning,' Maimie said brightly, as she entered. 'Why, how awfully weak and tired you look, I declare! Have you walked here far? What, all the way from Kensington! My poor child, that's a great deal too far for you. You'd better have a glass of port first, I think, and then we can talk all about the place at our ease afterwards.'

Hannah Gowland looked at the bright figure as Maimie danced out of the room in search of the glass of port, and was captivated at once by the brown eyes and the musical voice, as everybody who ever saw Maimie was always instantaneously captivated at first sight.

'Now, what wages have you been getting?' Maimie asked, with friendly informality, when the port was drunk, and they came to discuss the details of the arrangement.

She spoke to the girl as if she were an old acquaintance

dropped in casually for a morning call, not a servant come to inquire after a situation.

'I had thirty in my last place,' the girl said quietly: 'I'm a trained cook, you see, ma'am, and can make clear soup, and pastry, and jellies, and entrées, and all that; but if you're not in the habit of giving so much——'

'We generally give only twenty, you know,' Maimie said frankly, with her charming smile.

The girl looked at her with a spontaneous burst of unrestrained admiration.

'If it was only ten, ma'am,' she exclaimed vehemently, 'I'd rather come to live with a lady like you than take thirty —or a hundred for the matter of that, either—with any other family.'

Maimie bowed slightly at the compliment—she was accustomed to compliments, but still she loved them.

'I like you, Hannah,' she said simply. 'You're not strong: we shall make a comfortable home here for you, and take care of you—Mr. Chevenix is a doctor, though he doesn't practise now—and see you have something nice and strengthening. And as we mutually like one another—which is always pleasant—we'll make it thirty at once without any more talking, so as to start on a nice footing together in every way. Never mind about the reference, thank you. I never bother about those stupid references. I like best to judge people for myself, and find out whether I care for them or not personally. And I think we shall like one another, Hannah. Most people like me, and get on with me nicely. My last cook only went away to get married—such a capital match for her, too! Rest a little now before you go back. Lucy 'll take you down for a while to the kitchen.'

As Hannah Gowland went out of the door, the tears stood in her eyes and rolled silently down her pale cheek.

'She's a dear little lady,' she said to Lucy the housemaid, as they went down the kitchen stairs together.

And Lucy answered, in her coarse voice:

'Well, yes, as missuses go, she's not such a bad 'un; and when you've lived in a house nine months on the stretch you begin to know 'em and all their failings. But she's better'n most of 'em, I *will* say it for her. Always a pleasant

smile and a kind word and a look for everybody; and cook as is leaving wouldn't be leaving now either—what with the dripping and things, and her never inquiring about bottles and such—if it weren't that her young man has got a good place in the docks at Chatham, all along o' Mr. Chevenix, and they're going to be married next Toosday fortnight. But I think I'd ought to tell you at once that the kitchen range draws abominable.'

Maimie ran lightly from the library door down the back stairs to the laboratory.

'Sydney, Sydney,' she cried eagerly, 'you *must* come out with me. I've ordered the carriage for three, and I'm going round this very minute to see Jocelyn and Hetty on my way to Lady Macdonald's for tea, you know.'

Sydney looked up with an embarrassed air from the test-tubes that were simmering slowly in the sand-bath.

'My darling,' he said, 'must is for the Queen; and as you're my queen, I suppose I ought to obey you. But I don't see how I can possibly go this afternoon. This is the concluding day of a long experiment that's kept Benyowski and myself engaged for a fortnight. If I leave these tubes for a minute unwatched, the critical turn may pass by unnoticed, and we shall have to do the whole thing over again, let alone the possibility of blowing the house up. I should love to go with you, if only it were possible; but can't you manage without me just this once, my pet Maimie?'

Maimie pouted.

'You wouldn't have said that nine months ago,' she muttered provokingly.

'My darling, I wouldn't. You're quite right. Forgive me, Maimie, if I forget sometimes how very grateful I ought to be to you. But couldn't you wait till half-past three? Benyowski will be back by that time, for certain.'

Maimie shook her imperious little head, and pretended to be ostentatiously angry. She loved to exercise her power over dear old Sydney—that tame bear, that obedient, dry old scientific slave of her easy enchantments.

'No,' she answered peremptorily, 'I couldn't wait. The fine of the day will all be gone by that time. And, besides, I want to see Jocelyn's two new pictures while there's daylight

to see them by. It's the last day before he sends them in. This is what comes of a stupid girl marrying a great, clever, wise, scientific husband. He's fonder of his pots and pans and pipkins—after the first six months, of course—than he is of the poor little silly wife he promised to love and honour and cherish. Never mind, Sydney, I'll go by myself. It doesn't matter to me, I'm sure. I don't care a pin, really. I'd just as soon go without you, every bit, as with you. So there, stupid!' And she pouted her pretty lips at him.

Sydney stood undecided for a second, with his fingers playing dubitative on the test-tubes. Should he empty them then and there into the rubbish-bucket, and spoil the experiment? It was a fortnight's work wasted; but then—Maimie wished it. Pshaw! what was a fortnight to a man of leisure with a whole lifetime yet open before him for investigating the chemistry of the nitrogen-compounds? Nothing, nothing—less than nothing, compared with Maimie's faintest whim or fancy. Suppose she *was* a trifle unreasonable; don't we men love women just because they *are* women, and therefore unreasonable, and not even as we are, rational animals? Here goes, then; and in a second's space, the contents of the test-tubes were flung irrevocably into the big rubbish-bucket in the corner of the laboratory.

Maimie rushed up to him as he offered this petty domestic sacrifice on the connubial altar, and flung her arms around him with a sudden outburst of repressed affection.

'Oh, Sydney, Sydney!' she cried, 'it was very wrong of me—awfully wrong of me! I'm fearfully ashamed of myself. You shouldn't have given way to my foolish fancy. I didn't think you'd do it! I never meant you to do it! I've wasted your time, darling, and spoilt your experiment. It was too bad of me. You shouldn't have given way to me! Will you forgive me, can you forgive me, my darling?'

Sydney kissed her puckered white forehead with a faint sigh. In his own heart, he was conscious that he had been guilty of a culpable weakness. A man should hold his place better. But for Maimie's sake! He had done it for Maimie!

'It doesn't matter a bit, pet,' he whispered caressingly.

'We can easily repeat the experiment again from the very beginning. Only I haven't the face to tell Benyowski that I shied the stuff away, without waiting for the upshot. He'd despise me so for it—he isn't married, Maimie. I shall just write him a line, and leave it in the laboratory, to say in vague terms that the thing has miscarried. He must form his own conclusions the best way he can as to the cause of the miscarriage.'

But when Benyowski, half an hour later, read the few pencilled lines on a scrap of paper upon the laboratory table, he muttered to himself, as he stroked his close-shaven chin:

'He has gone out with madame!—he has gone out with madame! Ever since he brought that woman here, the explosives have just gone to the devil! Women are the very mischief in an experimental laboratory. The man of science who marries is simply lost.'

Meanwhile, Maimie was rolling round luxuriously in her carriage to Jocelyn Cipriani's in high good humour; while Sydney sat silent by her side, feeling, perhaps, just a trifle sheepish at his late proceedings. However much you may love a woman, it's unpleasant to think you've made a real fool of yourself just to satisfy her irrational fancies. But then it was Maimie! That makes a lot of difference, of course. Who wouldn't gladly make a fool of himself any day for dear, innocent, baby-faced little Maimie?

They found Jocelyn Cipriani in sore distress over a very small domestic misfortune. He had just spoilt, by a curious accident, his two pet water-colours by David Cox and Girtin.

'Cut my finger with my knife as I was paring the edge, you see,' he said to Sydney; 'and dropped the blood in great splashes upon both in half-a-dozen places. Of course, if they were my own sketches, it wouldn't matter twopence; I could scratch the blotches out and paint over it. But Cox and Girtin! The work of the hands that have passed away from us hopelessly for ever! A living human being isn't of much account in these overcrowded ages, they go on adding them to the population recklessly by the thousand in the rural districts, where people don't yet understand political economy; but a dead artist—a dead Raffael, a dead Rembrandt

—irrecoverable, irreplaceable, gone, gone for ever!' And he rubbed his hands in artistic despair.

Sydney scanned the damage closely with a critical eye.

'My dear fellow,' he said, taking Jocelyn's little pocket-lens from his hand and gazing into the sketches with it carefully, 'the difficulty is not by any means beyond the resources of science. I can soon give you something that'll remove the blood without in the least damaging the paper or the water-colours. An organic body like human blood is easily removed, leaving the earthy pigments that underlie it unaltered in any way; every chemist can do it for you in a moment. I'll send you round a bottle of stuff this evening that'll set it right in ten minutes. Only, don't divulge the secret, I beg of you, to all and sundry, for it might obviously be used of course by unscrupulous people for criminal purposes. The knowledge of it is for the emancipated only.'

'Ah!' Jocelyn cried, brightening up at the prospect of so easily restoring his precious sketches; 'a good idea! How lucky you dropped in! What a privilege it is to have a friend a chemist and a scientific authority! I'll keep the bottle, too, even if I don't display it too openly to everybody. It might come in useful some day unexpectedly, you see—if one happened ever to commit a murder.'

'Oh, Jocelyn!' Maimie cried, with a little shudder of involuntary horror. 'Did you say a murder? How *can* you talk so very dreadfully! It makes me quite frightened to listen to you.'

Jocelyn laughed.

'One never knows what may turn up next,' he said carelessly. 'Accidents will happen, you know, Maimie, even in the best-regulated families.'

'Jocelyn, I'm ashamed of you. Joking about murder!'

'Well,' Jocelyn answered; 'why not? I believe people attach a very exaggerated importance to murder, just because the legal punishment of the crime's so heavy. Many murderers, I should think, are quite as good in themselves as most other people; only they yield to impulse in a moment of passion, or a moment of revenge, or a moment of despair, or a moment of emotional intoxication. If a friend of mine

were to commit a murder, now, I wouldn't think very much the worse of him: not half as badly as if he ill-treated his wife, or behaved himself brutally to other people.'

CHAPTER XIX.

LADY WRAXALL AT HOME.

A YEAR had passed by since Maimie's wedding, and the Chevenixes were out at a big 'At Home' at the house of a well-known London hostess, the wife of a great fashionable doctor. Sydney was standing in the corner by the fireplace, watching Maimie talking to some handsome young man just opposite him—dear little Maimie! how she did enjoy this kind of thing, and how beautiful she looked in her new blue satin!—when Sir Anthony himself—the great physician—happened lightly to touch his arm, and say casually:

'Do you see that lady there, in the black grenadine—the one by the mantelpiece, talking to Lady Wraxall? That's Mdlle. Vera Trotsky.'

'Indeed!' Sydney said languidly. 'What, the Russian revolutionist? I've heard her name, but I didn't know she lived in London. What does she do here?'

'Oh, she gives lessons in music and drawing, I believe, and teaches Russian whenever (or if ever) she can get any pupils. She's a most remarkable woman in her way—an iron will, they say: the very heart and soul of the London Nihilists. My wife's taken quite a violent fancy to her. She's got a temper of her own, though, too. You should just see those pale blue eyes of hers flash with anger when her blood's up. It's a sight to frighten one. Nervous diathesis, you know, aggravated by hardships and political suffering.'

'Dear me,' Maimie said, joining the group even as Sir Anthony Wraxall spoke. 'One would hardly think blue eyes like hers could ever be terrible. They look so mild and gentle and washy. But did you say she was really a Nihilist? How very dreadful! I shouldn't like to know her.'

'I wonder whether she knows my assistant, Benyowski?' Sydney Chevenix remarked musingly. 'He half confesses

that he's a Nihilist himself. Perhaps they may be acquainted with one another.'

Mdlle. Trotsky's sharp ear had caught at once the sound of the Polish name, even in the midst of that babble of English voices.

'What,' she cried in French, ceasing at once from her animated discussion of Ohnet's last novel with Lady Wraxall, 'a friend of M. Benyowski's? Have I heard right? Have the goodness to introduce me, miladi. Thank you. This is the gentleman. So you know my compatriot, Stanislas Benyowski, do you, monsieur?'

'I do,' Sydney replied, unconscious of evil. 'He's my laboratory assistant.'

Vera Trotsky's cold blue eyes assumed at that moment a strange cat-like look of stealthy inquiry, which escaped neither Maimie's sharp notice nor Jocelyn Cipriani's (who stood close by), though the two men of science, less observant, perhaps, of human nature, entirely overlooked it.

'Your laboratory assistant,' she repeated, in an assumed tone of perfect unconcern. 'How very odd! I always understood my friend M. Benyowski was engaged solely in scientific and literary labours.'

'So he is, I believe, in his spare time: he's writing a history of Poland, he tells me; but his regular employment is at my laboratory, mademoiselle, where we work together upon the chemistry of explosives.'

'The chemistry of explosives! Dear me, how curious! Monsieur quite surprises me. I knew he was a chemist, but not a specialist. And how comes it that M. Benyowski, of all persons in the world, should possess any knowledge, then, of the chemistry of explosives?'

Sydney laughed.

'You can probably settle that question yourself far better than I can,' he answered, 'mademoiselle. I believe you are something of an authority, they say, on the doings of the Russian anarchists; and I fancy my assistant Benyowski acquired his knowledge somewhere in Russia as well as at Jena, whence he came to me excellently recommended by Professor Benecke.'

'And he makes explosives with you, then, monsieur?'

'He does, mademoiselle.'

'For what purpose?'

'Not for blowing up Czars or Emperors, you may be sure, dear lady. Ours is a peaceful experimental laboratory.'

'Good!' Mdlle. Vera said curtly. 'I am glad to have met an acquaintance of my compatriot, Stanislas Benyowski. Knowledge is power. You do well to pursue these useful investigations, monsieur. There are many valuable secrets in the manufacture of explosives known as yet only to our men of politics. But it is not well they should become too general.'

'A most interesting person, Mdlle. Trotsky,' the hostess said to Sydney a few minutes later; 'and though a Russian, too, such a perfect lady.'

'I dare say,' Sydney answered vaguely. 'But for my part, I always rather distrust these foreign communist people. They're too devoted to dynamite even for me, if you can credit it.'

CHAPTER XX.

VERA TROTSKY UTILIZES HER KNOWLEDGE.

PASSING down the Strand towards the City a night or two later, Stanislas Benyowski overtook his friend Trapmann.

'Ho,' he said, 'you look as if you were going to the Provisional Council. I didn't know there was a meeting on this evening. I haven't received any intimation.'

Trapmann looked at him, cold and immovable.

'No,' he answered, glibly and easily, without a second's hesitation. 'There's no meeting. I'm not going there. I'm simply going to call at Vera Trotsky's. She expects me this evening. I have an appointment with her.'

And even as he spoke, he went on, as if quite unconsciously, past the turning that led by the shortest cut to the street in Soho where the Nihilists held their weekly meetings.

'Oh, that's all, is it?' Benyowski went on in German—for all languages were much the same to him. 'So you and pretty little Fräulein Vera are particular friends just at

present, are you? A fair maiden, Fräulein Vera! Remember me to her most respectfully.'

And he turned away with a wave of the hand towards the street that led to his own lodgings.

Trapmann smiled a sinister smile as the Pole, grimly nodding to him, rounded the corner; and then, instead of continuing in the direction of Mdlle. Vera's, he made his way back by the next alley to the street he had already passed, leading to the meeting-place. 'Didn't know there was a meeting,' he said to himself sardonically. 'Not summoned. Received no intimation. There must be something up against him too, then. No doubt they have found out at St. Petersburg that he's corresponding with Alexander Alexandrovitch and the Third Section, and betraying our secrets to the mouchards of the Autocrat. Spies—spies—everywhere spies! The Cause of the People is beset with traitors. We shall soon hear the end, no doubt, of Master Stanislas Benyowski, turncoat!'

He continued his way, with a smile on his lips, to the attic Council Chamber, and was duly admitted by the ill-shaven Russian. All the members sat around the board much as usual, with the ominous exception of Acting Intendant Stanislas Benyowski.

As Trapmann entered, Vera Trotsky took her seat at the head of the board, and flung away the stump end of the cigarette which up to that moment she had been quietly smoking.

'The business of the evening,' she said in her usual nonchalant voice, after the first formalities had been fairly disposed of, 'is of a very unpleasant and disagreeable character. We have again to complain of treachery within the fold, and this time in the quarter where we least expected it. A friend delates Stanislas Benyowski, Acting Intendant, for betraying to outsiders the secrets of the Council, as regards the manufacture and use of explosives. Listen, comrades, and I will read you a letter.'

The rough group bent eagerly forward as Vera Trotsky read out in low, clear accents an anonymous communication from a friend of the Cause, accusing Benyowski of having divulged to an unknown Englishman the technical secrets of

the society. It was contrary to Nihilist etiquette for Vera Trotsky to delate him herself: all communications relating to real or supposed treachery within the fold were made anonymously: for the Council, like all other revolutionary tribunals, was inwardly devoured by the perpetual mania of mutual suspicion. A hushed silence prevailed in the room as long as the fair-haired girl continued to read, and then a chorus of voices burst forth at once, all talking together loudly in Russian, as soon as she had finished her terrible communication.

Presently, an animated discussion took place as to the probability of Benyowski's guilt or innocence, some of the Nihilists seeming very incredulous as to the truth of the anonymous reporter's story, while others were at once profoundly convinced of its certain genuineness and authenticity. The fact was, Sydney's chance allusion to his assistant formed the only basis for Benyowski's condemnation. But in the atmosphere of preternatural suspicion which always surrounds conspirators and revolutionists, that slender clue was amply sufficient. At last, Vera Trotsky raised her calm clear voice above the surrounding hubbub, and asked with an air of convincing logic:

'Is it not better that one suspected member amongst us should die, even if unjustly, rather than that the People's Cause should suffer wrong from secret treachery? What is one citizen's life among so many compared to the welfare of universal humanity. Let us put it to the vote: is it the will of the Council to remove Acting Intendant Stanislas Benyowski?'

There was a prompt show of uplifted hands, with but two dissentients. Vera Trotsky gazed at them significantly.

'It is not well,' she said in hard slow accents, 'to temporize with treachery.' The men listened, and seemed to cower before her stern cold glance. They hesitated for a moment, and then, as if against their wills, overpowered by the woman's masterful individuality, raised their hands reluctantly like the rest in obedience to her gesture. Vera Trotsky smiled a smile of feminine triumph. 'Good!' she said. 'The Council is unanimous. It is decreed that justice be executed on the person of Acting Intendant Stanislas Benyowski, traitor to

the Republic, Anarchical, and Indissoluble, and to the united Will of the Russian People.'

The group of listeners nodded approval with grave solemnity.

'Nicolas Gzowski,' the fair-haired girl secretary said once more, 'prepare the decree to carry out the Will of the People.'

Nicolas Gzowski took a sheet of paper, and rapidly wrote out the usual formula.

'Republic of All the Russias, Anarchical and Indissoluble. Meeting of the Provisional Council of the 20th November, New Style. The Council,

'Seeing that Stanislas Benyowski, Acting Intendant, has been found guilty on suspicion of treachery against the Republic and the Will of the People,

'DECREES

'That the said Stanislas Benyowski, Acting Intendant, be removed by such means as may prove most convenient; the execution of this decree being left to the person chosen by lot to give effect to the commands of the Council.

'The Provisional Councillor,

'NICOLAS GZOWSKI: 2137.'

'Is the decree accepted?' asked Vera Trotsky, in a solemn tone of formal inquiry.

All hands were raised unanimously in prompt reply to this official question.

'Draw lots,' the girl said in her imperious fashion, folding up a dozen little pieces of paper with eager fingers, and throwing them together into Gzowski's hat.

The lot fell to Karl Trapmann.

'It is well,' the German said, placing the paper solemnly in his bosom. 'By to-morrow night there shall be no such person in the land of the living as Stanislas Benyowski.'

Vera Trotsky arranged the straying curls of her frizzy fringe with careless fingers, and answered, smiling:

'You speak bravely, Brother Karl Trapmann. Have you such a thing as a cigarette about you? So, so; thank you, thank you.'

CHAPTER XXI.

OLD FRIENDS MEET.

It was a foggy afternoon the day after, and Maimie, coming out for a constitutional, turned her steps, she knew not why, towards Primrose Hill. Sydney was busy as usual in his laboratory—messing away with Benyowski at his nasty chemicals: what a thing it is to marry a scientific man!—and Maimie was glad to get away from the tedium of sitting alone in the solitary drawing-room (for she had no visitor stopping in the house), and turning carelessly over the dull pages of the stupid empty weekly papers. She had read through *Truth* and the *World* and the *Saturday*, bar politics, from end to end, and she didn't care for *Nature* and the *Academy*. So having nothing further to amuse her, she put on her cloak and hat out of pure *ennui*, and took a stroll listlessly out parkwards.

The world was all looking very grey and dingy and autumnal as she reached the slope of Primrose Hill. How very different from spring and summer at dear dull poky old Silbury! There, at least, there was sun and freshness. After all, life in London wasn't all parties, and dinners, and dances, and theatres. There were stray blank episodes every now and then of fog and autumn and afternoon. Why was afternoon invented at all, Maimie wondered: unless, indeed, it were on purpose to encourage the foolish and stupid practice of paying visits. This was a particularly gloomy afternoon: the sort of yellow London day on which, according to French authorities, the insular Briton, depressed beyond endurance by that painful national malady, the spleen, commits suicide in vast numbers by jumping over the parapet of Waterloo Bridge.

Maimie didn't want to commit suicide: that was the very last thing in the world that would ever have practically presented itself to her gay, easy, vacant little mind; and as she crossed the Regent's Canal, the water looked a great deal too cold and dirty and muddy for anyone ever to go and drown in. She was far too young and bright and vivacious, far too full of the internal joy of simple living, to be very profoundly affected by any mere passing barometrical influences.

When you are twenty-one, and have a good constitution, and are passionately fond of dancing, and enjoy your breakfast better than any other meal in the day, your own spirits are quite enough to carry you safely (so far as your policy of insurance is concerned) through the very direst inflictions of London fog.

Still, Maimie was not wholly unaffected in her own way by the prevailing greyness of external nature. It made her vaguely moody and discontented: it made her think life to some extent a failure, and pessimism an exceedingly sensible congenial philosophy. Sydney had got a book about pessimism on a shelf in his study, written by a Mr. James Sully; and Maimie had read a page or so out of the middle one other gloomy afternoon, and thought it all very nice and melancholy and dispiriting, and extremely demonstrative of the pleasant conclusion that the universe at large is one huge gigantic blunder. Such a clever word, pessimism! Maimie was quite proud of herself for being able to pronounce it, and to use it correctly in conversation without stumbling over it.

It's some consolation on a muggy day to feel that you know what pessimism means! And some consolation, too, to think that you are experiencing much the same sentiments as great philosophers like Hartmann, and Schopen-something, and Mr. James Sully himself, in whose book you have read all about them!

Still, in spite of the solace to be derived from that highly comforting word, pessimism, Maimie somehow felt that afternoon that the universe generally was out of joint. It's very nice, of course, to be married; and it's very nice to live in London; and it's very nice to be a clever man's wife; and it's very nice to have pretty dresses, and go out to dinner, and have lots of dances, and be admired and flirted with, and have nobody at all to scold you or bore you. Dear old Sydney was very kind—no one on earth could possibly be kinder: that Maimie frankly acknowledged to herself, for she was no grumbler. But then, she did wish he wasn't always poking and bothering all day long in that horrid, nasty, smellified old laboratory. Of course, if he was ever to be a great chemist, and become President of the Royal Society, and get knighted ('Lady Chevenix At Home' sounded

really very imposing) he must go on working at his chemicals and explosives to the end of the chapter. General Vanrenen, the great artilleryman at Shoeburyness, whom she met the other night at the Astronomer Royal's, had told her in confidence, if Sydney continued on his present course it was a moral certainty that sooner or later he must get knighted. Still, Maimie did wish in her own heart he was just a little wee bit more human! Why couldn't he come out with her that afternoon, for example, and take her to see the shops in Regent Street? To be sure, she hadn't asked him: and if she had he would no doubt have laid aside his crucibles and test-tubes immediately, and would have put on his hat, brushing it carefully, and taken her down with all his usual chivalrous courtesy. But he would have done it with the air of a man who makes a sacrifice, not spontaneously and of his own accord. Maimie didn't want chivalry and respect. She wanted a husband who made no sacrifices, and who stared in all the windows in Regent Street because it amused him.

Musing thus, more or less consciously, and in a nascent ill humour with the world in general and Sydney in particular, Maimie had reached the top of Primrose Hill, and was standing looking from that dreary summit through the drearier sea of pale yellow fog that lay floating vaguely in front of her. Suddenly, a figure loomed through the fog opposite her, and assumed visible form at last as a tall man in black clothes, smiling a grim smile at nobody in particular. As he approached, the smile relaxed into a look of hasty recognition, and Maimie saw to her great surprise that Adrian Pym stood before her.

Adrian drew a long breath.

'This is most singular,' he said with a little gasp at last. 'I recognise in this the finger of Providence. Or ought I rather to say . . . . Mrs. Chevenix. . . . that the devil has had his hand in our meeting?'

The fog cleared away at once from Maimie's horizon, and sunshine beamed once more brightly from her face as she held out her hand with the old childish smile to take the new comer's.

'Good-morning, Adrian,' she said, as simply and as

naturally as ever. 'I'm sure I don't know and don't care whether it was Providence or the other person who sent us here to-day; but I'm very glad we've happened to knock up against one another, anyhow. But why "Mrs. Chevenix"? I don't expect to be called that way by friends like you. In the old days, you know, Adrian, it used to be only "Maimie."'

Adrian grasped the little proffered hand in its tightly fitting number six French grey glove, with a sudden thrill of newly-born tremulousness.

'Then you haven't forgotten me, Maimie?' he cried eagerly, pressing it hard with a speaking pressure. 'It shall be Maimie still, if only you'll allow me. You haven't forgotten me? You haven't forgotten me?'

'Forgotten you, Adrian! Forgotten those delightful evenings at Silbury! Forgotten heaven! How could I ever forget you—you dear old stupid!'

'But, Maimie, Maimie, you're talking to me and looking at me just as you used to talk and look in the old days before you were married! I didn't expect such a greeting as this from—from Mrs. Chevenix.'

Maimie shook her little head with a wayward shake, and pouted wilfully.

'Mrs. Chevenix!' she cried. 'Again, Mrs. Chevenix! Why do you throw my marriage in my teeth, Adrian? Sydney's a very dear, good old fellow, and of course I love him awfully, and all that; but I don't want all the men I've ever been in love with to think I'm turned into quite another person, just because I've gone and stupidly married Sydney Chevenix.'

Adrian laughed a short little laugh.

'Candid as ever,' he said, 'Maimie! You needn't be afraid that "all the men you've ever been in love with"—as if you carried a round dozen of them hanging at your girdle, you audacious little woman—will ever suspect you of turning into anything so utterly conventional as a mere Mrs. Chevenix. Maimie you are, and Maimie you will always be—a dear, original, inimitable little innocent, incapable of bowing the knee in obedience to the stern command of Mrs. Grundy. How deliciously refreshing it is to meet you again! I declare,

Maimie, I haven't felt so happy before since the last day I parted from you at Silbury.'

Maimie paused and hesitated a second. Then she answered in a low and very soft voice, the three words:

'Nor I, Adrian.'

As she spoke, she lifted her eyes to his, and Adrian Pym read in them instantly the absolute truth (for the moment, at least) of what she said to him. His heart beat wildly and fluttcringly. She still loved him, then! She still loved him! He could hardly before have believed himself, that any woman's words could move him so profoundly.

'Then you love me still, Maimie!' he cried in a low voice, seizing her not unwilling hand a second time. 'Then you love me still! You haven't quite left off loving me!'

Maimie drew away her hand reluctantly, with a piercing glance into the dense fog all round (lest anyone should be coming), and answered with all the tenderness of her strange little nature:

'When I once love, Adrian, I love always. I love you dearly. I shall love you, and think of you, for ever and ever.'

Adrian stepped back a pace or two, and stood fronting her in deep emotion. Then he spoke again from the depths of his heart:

'Oh, Maimie, Maimie, it is too late! If we had only known twelve months ago what I know now! It is terrible, terrible!'

'What do you mean, Adrian?' Maimie cried, astonished. 'What is terrible? What are you talking about?'

'Why, Maimie, guess on what errand I came up to London from Oxford this very morning?'

'I can't guess, darling. Oh, tell me, tell me! Adrian—you haven't come up here—to marry some other woman?'

Adrian shook his head gloomily.

'No, no,' he said; 'not that, you may be certain. I was more than married enough already, darling. I came up to-day—for what, Maimie? Not to marry one, but to bury one!—to attend a funeral!'

Maimie clutched his arm eagerly.

'Not hers!' she cried, with a face pale with devouring

interest. 'Not hers, Adrian! Not hers, surely! You are not set free! Not your wife, my darling!'

Adrian nodded a solemn nod of acquiescence.

'Yes, Maimie,' he answered slowly. 'This morning I have had the melancholy pleasure of following to Kensal Green Cemetery the mortal remains of Mrs. Adrian Pym, who died on Saturday—twelve months too late for our happiness, curse her!'

Maimie sank as if exhausted upon the bare wooden seat on the hill-top, and began to rock herself to and fro in a slow, swinging, desperate fashion.

'Dead,' she murmured vacantly, making the word answer to each forward and backward movement of her body. 'Dead, dead, dead, too late, Adrian. Too late, too late, too late, Adrian. Oh, it *is* terrible, terrible, terrible!'

Adrian looked at her in blank despondency.

'The miserable creature!' he cried angrily. 'The wretched, drunken, miserable creature! She drank herself to death, at last, Maimie. I let her have as much brandy as ever she wanted, and at last she drank herself to death, the demon! But she was too long about it. Oh, Maimie, it's unbearable!'

'Adrian!'

'Well?'

'Why didn't you give her brandy earlier? Lots of brandy! Barrels of brandy! Oceans of brandy! twelve months earlier! Oh, my darling, my darling, tell me, I beg of you, why didn't you give her the brandy earlier?'

'Maimie, you are too terrible—too pitiless!'

'Adrian, I love you! What on earth do we care for that wretched woman? It might have been heaven! It *is* a tragedy! Oh, Adrian, Adrian, if you loved me—if you wanted me—for heaven's sake why didn't you give her the brandy earlier?'

Adrian shook his head once more.

'I didn't know it then,' he cried bitterly. 'I didn't know there was any chance of getting her to—to drink herself quietly to death, Maimie. If I had known, I would certainly —but there, what's the use of incriminating one's self all for nothing. It's too late and why talk about it? But oh!

Maimie, Maimie, Maimie! to think of what might have been if only you had consented to wait a little while for me, and hadn't married Sydney Chevenix! Why on earth did you do it, Maimie?'

'I loved him, Adrian.'

'And you love him still?'

Maimie hesitated.

'When I once love, I love always, darling,' she whispered softly. Then, after a pause, she added lower still, 'But not one half as well as I love you, Adrian.'

A fierce joy rose tumultuously within Adrian Pym's throbbing heart at the sound of those softly spoken irrevocable words. He would have given anything on earth at that moment if he could only then and there, on the open top of Primrose Hill, have clasped her hard within his eager arms, and pressed her tight against his straining bosom. What to him were laws and forms and conventions, what to him were the musty platitudes of moral philosophy, at that wild moment of despair and delight? She was his! She loved him! She had said so! She had confessed it still!—She was not his! She could never be his! She had thrown herself away—flung herself foolishly on a mere wooden stick of a Sydney Chevenix — while he, Adrian Pym, he, that outwardly cool, calm, and collected volcano, that tempestuous vessel of restrained passion, that profoundly emotional mass of veneered cynicism, he would have loved her and cherished her all his life long with all the devotion of his inmost concealed nature, far more than ever she deserved to be loved. Yes, he knew it himself: he felt it even then: with his searching introspective criticism, with his strangely truthful estimate of his own personality and hers, he confessed to himself that she was not really worth loving, and yet he could have flung away his very life for her that minute, were it only for a single long sweet kiss, such as they had often drunk in together on the twilight beach at dear old Silbury.

He stood and looked at her with hungry eyes, and his hands quivered as he held them restlessly before him, like a greyhound that longs to leap upon his prey. Maimie saw the terrible passion that was goading him almost beyond his powers

of restraint, and smiled benignly at him. It was so delightful to be able to move a mature man of his kind like that! Adrian Pym was thoroughly in love with her! And so was Sydney Chevenix! Both were profoundly in love with her, yet so differently. No wonder. She knew herself she was so pretty and so charming.

'Maimie,' the man cried at last, unable to keep in his devouring passion, 'it's too late. Too late! Why do you torture me? Why do you tell me now? Oh, why do you tell me?—And yet . . . I wouldn't have missed meeting you here to-day for ten thousand pounds. Ten thousand pounds! pooh! a drop in the bucket! I wouldn't have missed hearing you say what you've just said for the whole world and life itself, darling!'

Maimie smiled still demurely.

'Adrian,' she said, 'dearest Adrian, I have loved a great many men in my time—almost every man I've ever met with: but I've never loved anybody yet as I love you, my darling. I love dear old Sydney as I love all the others: he's such a good, kind, excellent fellow, and he's never cross or angry with me for anything; but you, Adrian! I love you somehow quite differently, my darling. I love you dearly, absolutely, devotedly. I should love you still, even though you trampled upon me. I think, Adrian, I should almost love you better if you were to trample upon me.'

Adrian turned and began to move down the hill rapidly.

'Come, Maimie,' he said, 'you must come down with me. I must walk: I must keep moving: I must work the steam off: if I stand here any longer, I shall have to take you in my arms, darling, and kiss you a hundred times over and over here in the open public pathway. Let us get down into the streets where there are plenty of people! Let us get away at once where everyone will see us.'

Maimie started and walked beside him for a minute or two in silence. Then she said at last, with perfect openness, in a simple voice of everyday conversation:

'If anything should ever happen to dear old Sydney, you know, Adrian——'

Adrian Pym broke from her with a start.

'Oh, Maimie,' he cried, 'you are too much for me—too much for me! You will drive me frantic. I can't stop with

you now any longer. I will write to you soon. I will come again to you. But if I stop any longer now, there'll be murder —murder! Good-bye, Maimie! Good-bye, for the present. I love you! I love you! I shall always love you!'

And without stopping even to raise his hat, he rushed away down a side-street, and disappeared immediately round the first corner.

CHAPTER XXII.

SCIENCE TRIUMPHS.

MEANWHILE, in the laboratory, Sydney Chevenix and Stanislas Benyowski were eagerly continuing the final experiments for their great invention of a noiseless explosive. For months they had toiled away at their long task, now apparently growing nearer their ideal goal, and now again seeming to get farther away from it; but on this particular afternoon, the last finishing touch was really being put to the grand discovery: they had eliminated every possible source of error or impurity in the original ingredients; they had perfected the direct self-compensating double wave-action, whereby the sound undulations, in their mutual interference, spontaneously deadened one another so as to be absolutely inaudible; they had secured all but the actual certainty of success: and now they were anxiously watching the last result, as the viscid material passed slowly and cautiously through the final stages of its long manufacture. At last it was finished, and Benyowski stood anxiously by Sydney's side as the master placed a small detonator by a tiny fragment of the deadly compound, and waited in breathless and tremulous silence to observe what followed on striking the hammer.

To Sydney's terrible and inexpressible disappointment, result there was none, visible or audible. For a second, the inventor's heart sank within him at the thought that their long and toilsome experiments had proved, in the end, a total failure. But Benyowski, with a cry of joy, pointed triumphantly next instant to the place where the lump of explosive had stood but a moment before; and then, to his unspeak-

able delight—oh, joy! oh, ecstasy!—Sydney saw that it was gone—gone utterly. The material had exploded and dissipated itself in the air invisibly and inaudibly. His heart stood still within him for delight. He had made a great, a marvellous discovery. He had perfected at last a noiseless explosive.

'Let's try it in a pistol,' he murmured in an awe-struck whisper to Benyowski—it seemed as if the great secret must be kept profoundly from all comers. 'Let's see if it'll project a bullet from a barrel as well as the other partial failures did!'

The Pole took up one of the pistols that lay in the laboratory without a spoken word—silent and grim as ever—and loaded it cautiously with the deadly material. He handed it to Sydney: the employer had the first right to make trial of the new and marvellous compound: and Sydney, lifting his arm fearlessly and taking good aim, fired straight at the centre of his experimental target.

No smoke—no noise—no sound of any kind. No symptom that the thing was fired at all. But the pistol kicked a little in Sydney's hand, and a bullet had buried itself, as if by magic, an inch deep in the solid wood of the thick deal target.

They looked at one another, sighing deep, with mute congratulation. Neither spoke: but Sydney held his hand out trembling to Benyowski, and the Pole grasped it eagerly with friendly fervour. In their way, they liked each other, those two diverse enthusiasts: their common interest in their deadly explosives made them feel towards one another a certain strange weird sense of fraternal affection.

Again and again they loaded and fired, one after the other, without exchanging a word, and always with the same extraordinary silence and perfect effectiveness. It was a grand invention: there was no denying it. It would revolutionize the art of war—and the practice of Nihilism.

Each thought his own thoughts to himself in silence, as they went on mechanically loading and reloading, with a fresh thrill of delight at every hole they put afresh in the well-riddled target.

Sydney's first thought was that he had now gained the

summit of his ambition, and would become a great and famous man, and Maimie would be proud of him, prouder than ever. He would make a present of the secret to the British Government—not sell it. He was a rich man, and he didn't need the money: and besides, his nature revolted from the bare idea of making wealth out of an instrument of slaughter. But it would be an instrument of civilization too—an instrument of well-doing—for its chief use would be in savage warfare, no doubt, where it would allow us at once to walk over the feeble resistance of half-naked warriors, who would fain retard the onward march of European culture. Yes, yes; it was an instrument of civilization: had not Wordsworth even said, in an address to Heaven:

> 'But thy most dreaded instrument
> In working out thy deep intent
> Is man arrayed for mutual slaughter;
> Yea, carnage is thy daughter!'

And then, how proud Maimie would be when she saw the honours heaped by a grateful country on the head of the man whose invention had made it invincible, irresistible, the embodiment of well-directed force, the greatest power of the European world, the guiding nation in the great upward course of human civilization and human progress.

Benyowski's first thought was, how easily with this, when Alexander Alexandrovitch (whom men call the Czar) was driving gaily down the Nevski Prospect, an enlightened patriot could hide behind a fourth-story window anywhere; and without noise, without flash, without smoke, without sign of any sort, send an avenging bullet, in the name of the sovereign people, straight through the heart of the accursed despot! And then, the new era of humanity would set in for all; for let them make fresh Czars, and crown them in the Kremlin every day of the week, the indefatigable Nihilists could pick them off unseen daily, and the glorious reign of universal anarchy would be begun at last in real earnest.

But neither man thought in his own heart, even, that he was aiding and abetting the introduction of fresh massacres and crimes and horrors and enormities, to a world already

stained enough with blood, by the horrid invention of yet another means of mutual slaughter.

By-and-by, even the inventors themselves grew tired of the childish iteration of bullet-shot after bullet-shot, ringing dead against the solid underlying wood-work. Then at last Sydney spoke.

'Benyowski,' he said, 'our work is done. We have made a really great discovery. Say nothing about it, I beg of you, to any man. I know you are silent, silent and trustworthy. Be silent still. The secret must not be divulged on any account. I must make my arrangements about it privately with the English Government!'

Benyowski nodded.

'I am silent,' he answered. 'Silent as the grave. No man shall hear of it, patron. I, too, have purposes for which it will be useful, but for whose full accomplishment silence is necessary.'

Sydney sat on the corner of the table.

'I think, Benyowski,' he said, with unwonted carelessness, 'we both now need a holiday. We've stuck awfully close at this thing while we've been working at it; and now we're done, we'd better rest awhile before going on any further. You may have your quarter's salary now, and go away if you like till after Christmas. Then we shall begin making arrangements for manufacturing the stuff upon a large scale, and letting Government have the benefit of the invention.'

Benyowski bowed.

'As you please, patron,' he said grimly; for he thought in his heart it would be a good opportunity for him to take a little trip, on business and pleasure combined, as far as St. Petersburg.

Sydney sat down to the table at once, and wrote him out a cheque for a quarter's salary.

'You may go now, Benyowski,' he said shortly. 'I'd rather be alone. I feel almost broken, overwhelmed, crushed down by the very magnitude of the great invention.'

Benyowski folded the cheque up carefully and stuck it in his pocket, nodded a friendly nod obliquely to his employer, and went straightway out of the laboratory.

For a minute or two, Sydney sat alone still on the table,

scarce able fully to grasp in all its implications the real greatness of his wonderful discovery: and then an unwelcome voice broke in upon him unexpectedly from the top of the staircase—the laboratory was upon the basement floor:

'Sydney, Sydney—can I come down? or if I do shall I be blown to pieces?'

It was Jocelyn Cipriani.

Sydney pulled himself together from his deep reverie with a great effort, answering as unconcernedly as he was able, 'Come down, my dear fellow. Delighted to see you.' And as he did so, he pushed away the pistol carelessly on one side, but not before Jocelyn's quick eye had taken in the action quite instinctively. On no account must he tell even Jocelyn. The secret must be profoundly kept from absolutely everybody.

Jocelyn had brought a friend with him—a brother painter, Hardy by name—who wanted to consult the distinguished chemist as to a picture he was working at of the death of the Czar Alexander II. Chevenix would know all about the explosives, Cipriani had told him; for not only was Chevenix himself a great authority on dynamite and its congeners, but he had moreover permanently in his employment a genuine Polish Nihilist—not wholly unsuspected of political crime—a man whose name was Something-or-other-owski.

Yet for some extraordinary and inexplicable reason, on this particular afternoon, Sydney refused entirely to be drawn in any way on the subject of explosives. The interruption was, in fact, an untimely one. He was too excited and preoccupied now to talk of anything but his great discovery, and about that, of course, he must be profoundly silent.

'I'm sick and tired of explosives,' he said apologetically to Jocelyn Cipriani. 'I really can't converse intelligibly upon anything at all this afternoon. If Mr. Hardy would only call some other day, when I'm less weary and bothered, I should be happy to demonstrate for him: if he likes, I can blow a Czar up just to show him how we do it. The fact is, my dear fellow, I've been overworking myself lately, and I've quite determined to take a holiday. I've just paid Benyowski a quarter's salary on the nail beforehand, and told him to be off about his business. And, indeed, I feel I've quite over-

done it. We've been watching hour after hour for the last fortnight, and now our experiments are well over—successfully, I'm glad to say—a reaction has set in, and I'm quite washed out and unfit for anything.'

Jocelyn had never seen Sydney look so strange and preoccupied before—there was certainly something or other wrong about him. But he only said :

'My dear boy, you've been doing too much. I'm awfully glad you're going to rest awhile. I shall tell Maimie she must look well after you. We won't trouble you any more this afternoon. Some other day I dare say you'll be able to give Hardy some descriptions and diagrams.'

Sydney smiled feebly—he was really very tired—and went up to see them out of the front door. Lucy, the housemaid, came out unbidden as they passed, and opened the door for them. Jocelyn remembered all these little unimportant details afterwards: they were indelibly impressed upon his memory and upon Hardy's by the subsequent facts of that eventful evening.

As soon as they got outside the door, Hardy observed casually to his friend :

'Don't you think there was something very odd about your friend Chevenix's manner? Did you notice he had a pistol lying upon the table, and he tried to hide it the moment he saw us coming? I really fancied there was something or other awfully queer the matter with him.'

Jocelyn laughed away the vague suspicion.

'There are always pistols in Chevenix's laboratory,' he replied carelessly. 'Chevenix uses them constantly for experimenting on his different explosives. I never go down without inquiring whether I shall be received with a volley of musketry. He's all right. It's just his way. He only wants a little rest and quiet.'

As for Sydney, he went back to his room dreamily by himself, and helped himself, with quivering hands, to a glass of port from the decanter in the cupboard.

CHAPTER XXIII.

APPLIED SCIENCE.

MAIMIE, when Adrian left her, didn't feel as if she cared to go home at once to dear old Sydney, so soon after that small whirlwind of passion with her half-forgotten Oxford lover; so by way of interposing a little variety, she strolled down to Portland Place by herself, and had a good look at all the bonnets in all the windows in the whole length of Regent Street. One in particular took her fancy much. She had no money with her, but quarter-day for her allowance would come round soon, and of course then she could pay for it easily. (For generous as Sydney's allowance was, Maimie somehow always anticipated it.) She went in and tried the bonnet on. It was very becoming, and quaint and quakerish, and not so very dear either—at least, as one counts dear nowadays, Maimie thought to herself; at Silbury, of course, in the old days, the price would have been simply prohibitive.

'I'll take that one,' she said carelessly to the young woman who waited on her. 'You're sure it suits me, are you? You don't think they're worn now just a wee bit more off the forehead?'

'No, madam,' the young woman answered; 'this is the very latest thing we've had from Paris. There isn't another bonnet like it in all London.'

'Dear old Sydney will think me so pretty in it,' Maimie thought to herself complacently. 'He always likes me so much in old gold and maize colour. He does love to see me looking dressy. . . . Or Adrian, if he comes again, and I have to go out a walk anywhere with him. Adrian's so awfully fond of seeing me dressed as a pretty girl ought to be. I wonder whether he noticed my new cloak this afternoon. I dare say he really didn't. Men never see what one wears at all when they're interested, or making love, or anything of that sort, unless one positively calls their attention to it. But he'll come again soon. He said he would, and I know he'll do exactly as he promised. He's a dear fellow, Adrian. He isn't nearly as good as Sydney, of course; and yet somehow or other, I feel as if I liked him all the better for it.'

From Regent Street, Maimie took a cab up home to Beaumont Terrace, and reached the door at five o'clock, just as Sydney was beginning to think of closing the laboratory.

She walked into the bare back room, in spite of her interview with Adrian, as light, and gay, and innocent as ever.

'Oh, Sydney,' she cried, 'what do you think I've gone and done? I've bought myself such a duck of a nice new bonnet. I'm sure you'll like it. And who do you think I've seen and met? Why, dear old Adrian Pym; you remember my speaking of him: the Oxford tutor who used to bring the reading-parties down to Silbury. I *was* so glad to see him again! He and I were great chums in the old days, you know, and I used to go out fishing with him, over and over. I was so glad to see him I could have positively kissed him, only it was on top of Primrose Hill; if it had been here, you know, or upstairs in the drawing-room, I really think I should have done it, I was so delighted. However, he says he'll come and see us here some day before long; and if he does, I know I shall kiss him.'

Sydney smiled. It was a relief to him to have his pretty little wife burst in upon him so suddenly, and break the current of his thoughts that went whirling round and round in his brain, on the one subject of the new explosive.

'I wouldn't advise you to,' he said, kissing her and pinching her soft round cheek between his thumb and finger. 'You dear old Maimie, you're really and truly a shade too innocent. *I* know you, and I understand you, and I would quite feel in what way you meant it. But Pym probably wouldn't see it in the same light. All men are not as simple-minded as you are, Maimie. He'd probably go away and say to all the other fellows at his club and his college that Mrs. Chevenix was a dreadfully forward improper person, who actually kissed him.'

'You dear old Sydney! it's you yourself who're too simple-minded. I wish I was only one-half as good and innocent as you are. And yet I don't: for I like to be original, and I believe you love me all the better for it.' (Sydney smiled and nodded.) 'But Adrian Pym's such a darling, you know! Nobody on earth could think it was

wrong to kiss him. Oh, Sydney,' clasping her hands ecstatically, 'his moustache, my dear boy—why, there, his moustache, I declare, it used to be so scraggy, and now it's grown just simply delicious!'

Sydney laughed outright, and laid his hand caressingly upon her plump round shoulder.

'Why, Maimie,' he said, 'do you know, there isn't another wife in all London who'd venture to talk that way about another fellow to her own husband. And there isn't another husband in all London who'd let his wife talk to him that way about another fellow. You're really too open-hearted altogether, little woman, and I'm not sure that I'm doing right in not stopping you. For your own sake, darling, you must moderate your transports. It isn't usual, you know; it isn't conventional; it isn't what people are at all accustomed to. Alone here with me, of course, it doesn't matter the least bit in the world; but you'd say exactly the very same things, I feel sure, if half the dowagers in London society were all listening to you, and that would seem awfully queer to them.'

Maimie threw herself down in the one easy-chair, held her two arms up behind her head in the most becoming and listless attitude, and said with her sunniest and brightest smile:

'Now go on. Continue the lecture. I'm quite sure you're going to give me a lecture, Sydney.'

'A lecture, darling? To you, Maimie? Why, you dear little bit of floating thistledown, what on earth would be the use of scolding you, I wonder? I only meant——'

'There now, Sydney, I knew it was coming.'

Sydney bent down with a broad smile, and kissed her tenderly.

'It isn't coming,' he answered, with a good hard pinch, 'and you know it isn't, Maimie, as well as I do. I won't say another word about it. I love you just as you are: innocence and transports and kisses and all, darling; and I don't care twopence myself whether you kiss Adrian Pym or not, out of the fulness of your heart, you dear old thing, you. So there's another for yourself, and two of them, too, and that closes the subject entirely for the present.'

Maimie leaned back in the chair with her eyes shut, and

threw back her head (half unconsciously) so as to show off the full white beautiful neck in all its voluptuousness to the greatest advantage. Sydney Chevenix thought, as he gazed at her lovingly that moment, he had never before seen her in his life look so absolutely and statuesquely beautiful. No, not statuesquely; for the colour in her cheeks was higher than usual, and the excitement of the interview with Adrian Pym had left her face even more than ordinarily flushed and vivacious. Sydney stood and looked at her long, and Maimie, though her eyes were closed tightly, felt by instinct that he was looking hard at her.

After a while, she opened her big eyes with a sudden flash, and asked with much show of wifely interest:

'What have you been doing to-day at your work, Sydney?'

Sydney started. She seldom seemed to feel much curiosity as to his scientific studies, and he was pleased and gratified that on this particular evening, when he had hit upon what was probably the greatest military invention of the present century, she should happen to ask him, all of her own accord, what he had been doing.

'Why, Maimie,' he said, 'you don't know what great discoveries I've been making to-day. I've found out something that may probably revolutionize henceforth and for ever the whole art of artillery and of warfare. I've found out something that may prove in the end as great an advance upon the use of gunpowder as gunpowder itself was upon the crossbows and arrows of the Middle Ages. I've found out what I believe to be a perfectly noiseless and smokeless explosive, Maimie.'

'And will they make you a knight for it, do you think, darling?'

'A knight, little woman! Why, what a funny notion! How your dear little woman's brain does jump to conclusions! A man would never have dreamt of thinking of that, now. Well, no, I don't suppose they'll knight me all at once for it—that would be going ahead very fast indeed, Maimie. And yet, after all, if the invention's really as great a one and as useful a one as I'm inclined to fancy it is, I don't see why in the end I shouldn't look forward to getting a knighthood, if

that's any sort of consolation to you, darling. . . . Oh yes. They've knighted lots of fellows for only inventing some new variety of gun or rifle, and I should think they'd certainly knight a man—in the long run—who invented a totally fresh and invaluable explosive for military purposes.'

'Perhaps they might even give him a peerage,' Maimie suggested, playing idly with the pistol which lay upon the plain wooden table of the long laboratory.

Sydney laughed.

'How you do jump, Maimie,' he answered gaily, smoothing her hair, and removing the pistol gently from her hands. 'Give a woman an inch, and she takes an ell: allow her a knighthood on account for her husband, and she straightway goes in for discounting the future and making it a peerage. No, I don't suppose, darling, in any case it'd run to a peerage. The House of Lords will probably be abolished altogether, and hereditary rank be done away with in England, long before the time arrives at which my new explosive could conceivably constitute a claim to be made a junior baron. Still, it's a very nice little useful family explosive for all that. Look here, Maimie, you'll be quite astonished at what it does. Just see me fire now at this piece of board here.'

He put up a thick board on the laboratory easel—the other was long since riddled through and through—and loaded the pistol carefully with some of his new anacoustic explosive. Then he put in a conical bullet, and fired quickly at the extemporized target. There was neither smoke nor flash nor sound of gunpowder, as before; but Maimie, looking intently at the board, saw a hole drilled suddenly, as if by magic, in its very centre, through which the gaslight from the burner behind shone luridly. The bullet had passed clean through the board, and buried itself in the thick wooden padding at the end of the laboratory.

Maimie laughed and clapped her hands childishly—she thought Sydney would like to see she felt a proper interest in his new invention. Then she took up the pistol again from his hands, and asked cautiously:

'Is it loaded, Sydney?'

'No,' Sydney answered, letting her take it from him carelessly: 'it isn't loaded, Maimie; but if you'd like to fire it

yourself and see how it works, I'll load it again for you to try with: only mind you must aim straight, and be awfully particular.'

'Oh, how nice!' Maimie cried eagerly. 'Fancy being the very first person in the whole world, except the original inventor, ever to try a new discovery! I shall always be awfully proud of it, Sydney!'

Sydney loaded the pistol at once, and handed it back to her with a smile of real triumph.

'Mind you don't hurt yourself,' he said cautiously. 'Hold it well away from you. It's very explosive and dangerous stuff. It goes off with the faintest pressure on the trigger, mind you.'

'Will it burst in my hands?' Maimie asked, hesitating, and letting the muzzle point upwards as she spoke towards the ceiling of the laboratory.

Sydney seized her hand in haste, and turned the muzzle horizontal in some trepidation.

'No, it won't burst,' he answered smiling; 'but if it goes off pointing up like that, Maimie, it'll smash through the ceiling in half a second, and into the breakfast-room, and kill cook or somebody, and then of course you'll be had up for manslaughter right off, little woman.'

Maimie shuddered a visible shudder with her expressive shoulders, and held the pistol at arm's length timidly before her.

'Shall I fire, Sydney?' she asked, pointing towards the target with her finger on the trigger.

'Fire away,' Sydney answered briskly.

Maimie's forefinger pulled the trigger with some tremulousness. Again there was no smoke or flash or tumult, but she felt the butt-end kick a little against her arm as far as the shoulder, and saw another big round hole come not very far from the centre of the target.

'Well fired indeed!' Sydney exclaimed, applauding. 'Why, Maimie, you've made a regular bull's-eye! Anybody'd say you'd been accustomed all your life to constant practising.'

'So I have,' Maimie answered laughingly. 'Poor papa used to make me practise at a target with a rusty naval pistol down at dear old Silbury. He said it prevented women

from having nerves. I often made golds, and sometimes centres. But I don't seem quite to like this new explosive of yours, Sydney. It looks uncanny, somehow. It goes off too smooth and fast and sudden, don't you know, without any bang, or smash, or flare, or fizzmagig. I don't like a pistol to go off silently. It seems so murderous, to me, I fancy. Don't you think a pistol like this now is very dangerous? Oh no, I don't mean to the person who fires it off, of course, Sydney'—for Sydney had pantomimically expressed extreme disapproval—'but don't you think it'd be a dreadful thing to put into the hands of murderers, and burglars, and such-like people? You see, they could just commit a murder with it quite suddenly, and nobody'd ever hear or know anything about it.'

'Well, but they can stick a knife into you now as it is, can't they, and nobody objects that knives are noiseless. We don't refuse to manufacture steel blades on the ground that rogues can go and stick them into one another silently.'

'Ah, but that's such a very different matter, you know, Sydney,' Maimie retorted, growing quite argumentative. 'If a man uses a knife, he must be close up to the person he strikes, and the person must be able to struggle a little, and, more or less, defend himself. And then, the murderer gets blood on his clothes, of course, and all that sort of thing, so there's some chance of one's detecting him afterwards. And with a pistol and ordinary gunpowder, there's a bang and a flash, you see, that excites attention, and gets the murderer identified at once. But with this dreadful new stuff of yours, it seems to me a man can pop his head out of a window anywhere, quite unobserved, and shoot anybody down in the street; and the somebody would drop down dead all of a sudden, for no visible reason, and until they came to pick him up and see there was a bullet-hole drilled right through him, they'd all think it was only apoplexy, or heart disease, or something.'

'Quite true,' Sydney said, delighted, for he was pleased to see Maimie show so much interest in anything that happened in the laboratory. 'I've thought of all that already, Maimie. That's a very serious question to settle, I admit. But I don't think it's really of much importance compared with the value to the nation of such an extraordinary explosive—the

secret of which, of course, I shall keep to myself and our own Government—especially in dealing with uncivilized enemies. Just fancy! suppose they had some of it now out at the seat of war over yonder: they could send a few dozen selected sharp-shooters out behind the enemy somewhere, and pick off any number of these nigger fellows at once, without their ever being able to discover so much as where the firing came from. What a fearful stampede there'd be, as soon as they saw their men bowled over as if by magic, tumbling down right and left on every side of them! They'd run away *en masse* as hard as ever their legs could carry them. There'd never have been such a stampede in all history, since Sennacherib's men ran away from Hezekiah.'

Maimie smiled a smile of recognition—she had read as far as that in the Bible, and recollected the circumstance in question somewhat vaguely—but she shuddered at the same time with a little shudder of genuine horror, as she answered back:

'Oh, Sydney, how on earth can a dear, kind, good fellow like you talk in that way about bowling people over? Just fancy! a lot of poor, helpless, ignorant negroes lying bleeding all around one dying on the ground! And to think that that's what you're working and scheming for—here at ease in your own house—you, who are so clever, and so wise, and so gentle. I wonder you don't try instead to invent something to cure the toothache. I can't understand how you can ever go on inventing explosives. Don't tell the secret to anybody, Sydney! Don't, there's a dear, good, sweet old love of a husband! Consider the harm you might be the means of doing.'

She spoke persuasively, and Sydney thought at that moment he could almost have given up his legitimate hopes of fame and reputation for the sake of one tiny tender kiss from her pretty little ripe red rosy lips there. But he loaded the pistol carelessly once more, and handed it to her, saying as he did so:

'Just you try it again, at the target, Maimie. It's lovely when you get used to it. I've been firing away myself all the afternoon for pure pleasure at my own invention. Have another shot, and see how nice it is.'

Maimie took the pistol from his hands with a womanish reluctance, and fired once more at the target opposite. The rebound seemed even lighter than before, and the bullet went magically, clean through the board, to Maimie's intense delight and amusement. It was just the sort of thing she loved doing. There was a neatness and concinnity about the way it worked that charmed her childish mind unspeakably.

'Do load again,' she cried, 'Sydney! I love it awfully. It's just beautiful—for a mere toy, you know—only to amuse one's self with. I think it's really a lovely invention. I could go on firing all the evening.'

'So could I,' Sydney answered, reloading quickly. 'I love to see the noiseless effect produced so instantaneously on the board opposite one. It seems so like the "Arabian Nights." You pull a trigger, and hi, presto! a man falls down dead at once before you.'

'Would it go through a man like that?' Maimie asked, shuddering, even as she fired.

'To be sure it would. Clean through him at a shot. Its explosive force is, weight for weight, about fourteen times that of gunpowder. You don't care for the exact decimals, I suppose, do you?'

'I don't know what decimals are, I'm sure,' Maimie answered, with a little toss of her pretty round head; 'but I don't like to think about a bullet making a great hole like that right through a human body. I call it awfully wicked of you, Sydney, to go inventing new ways of killing off your fellow-creatures. Load the pistol again for me please, will you?'

Sydney laughed, and loaded gaily.

'You don't seem to have much practical objection to the explosive, anyhow,' he said, handing it back to her. 'You appear to like firing it just as well as I do.'

Maimie fired and handed the pistol back a fourth time.

'I think I could go on shooting for ever,' she answered merrily.

Sydney loaded for her three or four times more, and then a sudden quaint fancy struck him forcibly.

'Look here,' he said, handing her the pistol. 'Let's see

whether you could knock over a real live nigger. I'll go and chalk my own size upon the board yonder, and you shall try whether you can cover me. Practise at a man, in short: bowl him over in every possible part: try first his heart, then his head, then disable his legs, and so on till you're really a proficient amateur sharp-shooter. See here, Maimie,' and he turned his back to her over by the target. 'I shall take this fresh piece of board, and chalk my figure out in black upon it. Head here: that's about my height: the shadow from the gas does admirably to chalk it by. Now shoulders—that's right: you shall have a live man to practise upon if you'll wait a moment.'

'Oh, Sydney,' Maimie cried, raising the pistol, 'how can you talk so very dreadfully! I won't do it. I'll never do it. I couldn't even fire at a man's shadow.'

'Nonsense, Maimie! It's nothing when you're used to it. You must aim at the heart, you know. That will kill him instantly.' His back was still turned to her. 'Aim not too high nor too low, but straight for the heart, little woman. About this point, you see, where I put a cross upon him. That'll bring him down the instant he's hit, as dead as a doornail.'

As Sydney spoke, Maimie's hand raised itself to the exact attitude, and held the pistol poised point-blank at Sydney's back while he stood there marking the black cross above the heart of his imaginary figure.

'I could put a hole right through him, Sydney,' she said, with a wry face. 'Before he knew where he was, he'd be lying dead down upon the rug there. Ugh! how horrible!'

At that moment her face flushed suddenly, and a terrible thought swept with a flash across her whirling brain—so terrible, that even complacent little Maimie grew pale as death at the bare idea of it. What was it she had said that very afternoon to Adrian Pym, as they walked down Primrose Hill together? 'If anything should ever happen to dear old Sydney, you know, Adrian——' The rest was silence.

If anything should ever happen to dear old Sydney! Anything ever happen to dear old Sydney! Happen to Sydney! Happen to Sydney!

She held her hand trembling upon the trigger. Sydney,

all unconscious, went on chalking out the arms and fingers, with his back still steadily turned towards her. A single motion of that little forefinger, and all would be over. Adrian, Adrian, dear Adrian! How her forefinger trembled! It requires such a very tiny pull to fire a pistol! If anything should happen to dear old Sydney! But what could happen to him? Oh, heavens, what an awful eternity of hesitation! How easily one pulls the little trigger! A faint impulse, a wavering movement, a sudden, half-unconscious jerk of the forefinger, and then——

No noise, no cry, no sound of any sort. But Sydney, turning round to her slowly, clapped his hand like lightning upon his right breast, and murmured in a dazed and stupefied manner:

'You have shot me, Maimie. Shot me! Shot me! How on earth did you ever manage to do that, darling?'

CHAPTER XXIV.

SYDNEY GOES.

With a little suppressed scream of horror and agony, Maimie rushed up at once trembling in every limb to where Sydney was standing, or half staggering, over by the target. Though she had pulled the trigger by a voluntary effort, well knowing at the instant what she was doing, she didn't even yet fully realize the true effects of that terrible momentary impulse. Sydney stood looking at her tenderly, with his hand still pressed in a breathless fashion against his right breast; and Maimie felt in some vague, uncertain way that the bullet must have passed right through his body, and come out at the spot where his hand was held with convulsive tightness. She flung her arms around his waist wildly, and cried in a voice of deadly terror:

'Sydney, Sydney! my darling Sydney, have I killed you—have I killed you?'

'I don't know,' Sydney answered slowly, staggering to a chair like a drunken man. 'The bullet must have passed just below the right lung: it's bleeding profusely. Make me a bandage—quick, Maimie!'

Maimie tore the little white table-cover to pieces in a second, and, opening his waistcoat, passed it hastily round his body outside the shirt, so as just to staunch the external bleeding.

'My darling,' she cried, 'my own darling! I have killed you! I have killed you! Oh, Sydney! I have killed you!'

'How did you do it, Maimie?' Sydney asked huskily. His strength seemed to be ebbing fast. 'Did it go off in your hand by accident?'

Maimie flung herself passionately on the floor at his feet.

'Sydney!' she cried, looking straight in his face, simple and truthful and direct as ever. 'You will never forgive me. You can't forgive me. It's too horrible to tell you . . . My darling, my darling, I did it on purpose. . . . I meant to shoot you. I don't know what devil put it into my heart, my darling, my darling, but I pulled the trigger deliberately. I knew I was shooting you. I did it intentionally. I meant to shoot you.'

Sydney staggered madly to his feet.

'You meant to shoot me, Maimie!' he cried with convulsive energy, laying his hand tenderly upon her crisp black locks. 'You meant to shoot me, darling. My God! my God! what is this you're saying to me! Tell me, tell me, before I die, why in Heaven's name did you wish to shoot me?'

Maimie crouched terrified at his feet and clung to his knees, with head hung down, as she answered in a low but perfectly articulate voice:

'It was Adrian Pym, Sydney. Adrian Pym made me think of it. I said to Adrian this afternoon—I met him up on Primrose Hill—"If anything were ever to happen to dear old Sydney, Adrian——"'

Sydney's voice failed him for a moment. He stood there, dazzled, stunned, and speechless, struck through the heart a thousand times worse than when the bullet had passed through his body ten seconds earlier.

'Then you meant to shoot me, just to get rid of me, so that you might marry Adrian, Maimie?' he said at last, very slowly, but quite pitifully.

'Oh, Sydney! Oh, my darling? It was a moment's impulse. I hardly knew what I was doing! I do love him so dearly, Sydney.'

The wounded man paused irresolute for half a second, as if struck with palsy. Then he disengaged Maimie's arms from about his knees with tender solicitude, and staggered over to the laboratory writing-table.

'This is a bad business, dear little woman,' he said, stroking her head gently with his left hand (for she had followed him over to the table, and flung herself once more in agony at his feet). 'If we don't do something at once, they'll be taking you up, my own darling, for having murdered me! Oh, my darling! my darling! if you wanted to get rid of me, for Heaven's sake why didn't you trust me and tell me beforehand, and let us two plan it carefully together, instead of shooting me offhand in this foolish, open, unconcealed manner! Unless I have strength enough to write a letter, I'm afraid, Maimie, they'll go and hang you—hang you, my pet!—you, Maimie! Oh, my darling! my darling, it's too terrible to think of!'

'Sydney, Sydney! darling Sydney, you won't die, will you? Oh, don't die, Sydney—don't tell me I've really, really killed you?'

Sydney drew the pen and paper to him as he answered feebly—for all the time he was bleeding without pause:

'If I can possibly do it, I'll keep alive for you, darling. If I keep alive, I can swear I did it myself by accident. But if I die, I'm terribly afraid you'll find it a hard task to prove yourself innocent, Maimie.'

He took up the pen and wrote hastily across a sheet of note-paper. Maimie looked over his shoulder and saw the words as he traced them along the page with trembling fingers. A drop of blood fell from the wound upon the paper while he wrote. Sydney blotted it away upon the blotting-pad in haste, and went on writing without taking any further notice of it. The words were written in his ordinary hand, with very little more shaking or tremulousness than might easily have been accounted for by the circumstances he imagined in them.

'DEAREST MAIMIE,

'I am tired of life. My reasons for shooting myself will never be known to you. But I am about to take my own life, and I beg your forgiveness for what I am doing. Good-bye for ever, darling. God bless you.

'Your loving Husband,

'SYDNEY CHEVENIX.'

He laid down the pen with a deep sigh of inexpressible relief.

'There,' he said, 'I've had strength enough to do it. That will suffice to exculpate you, Maimie. Thank God, darling, I've had time to save you! Now go, little wife. Go at once, I beg of you, I implore you. I must be left here to die alone, or all's lost. Go up to your own room, darling, and try not to let anyone see you going there. Don't let them come to look for me here till just dinner-time. I'll do my best meanwhile to live. Go at once; go, darling.'

Maimie threw her arms around him once more with a wild gesture of utter despair, and sobbed out frantically,

'Oh, Sydney, Sydney, I can never leave you! My darling, my darling, you're too good to me! Whether they hang me or whether they don't, I shall never, never, never leave you.'

Sydney unwound her clasping arms again with a little cry of instinctive horror.

'Oh, Maimie,' he said, 'what ever are you doing, sweetheart? You've got the horrid tell-tale blood smeared all over your dear jacket. Take it off at once, darling, and put it on the chair here. There, that's right! Now for Heaven's sake don't come a step nearer to me. Go, go, go at once—for God's sake go, I tell you—or else the game's lost for ever.'

'Never,' Maimie cried, flinging herself with clasped hands into the easy-chair. 'I don't care whether they hang me or not, but I'll never leave you, my husband, my darling.'

Sydney tore off his coat and waistcoat with fast-failing hands, and bound the other half of the table-cover around his body, under the shirt. As he did so, he looked through his clothes at the wound.

'O God' he cried, as he saw the direction of the bullet,

'this is a worse business than even I thought it was. Maimie, I must try to live for your sake. If ever I die, it'll be all up with you. That was a foolish letter to write. I've no strength or nerve left now to write another one. But even the letter will never save you, I'm terribly afraid. The doctors will all know as soon as they see it, such a wound as that could never possibly be self-inflicted.'

Maimie sat still in the chair, rocking herself madly to and fro, as she had done that afternoon at Primrose Hill, and muttering in an agonized voice,

'Oh, Sydney, Sydney, before you die, say you forgive me, say you forgive me!'

'Forgive you, my darling,' Sydney answered with a fresh access of strength. 'There's nothing to forgive, Maimie! It was the impulse of a moment. I know what you are, darling! A child, a dear little, simple, innocent child, Maimie. If everyone else would only look at it as I look at it, they'd kiss you, so, and forgive you easily.'

As he spoke, he leant over her tenderly, and kissed her forehead.

Maimie, looking up at him in agony from between her clasped hands, pressed upon her face, saw to her surprise that he had managed to put on his big ulster.

'Oh, Sydney—husband—what are you going to do?' she cried in sore astonishment.

Sydney answered only half-inarticulately, with a gurgling sound low in his throat,

'Can't die here and let you get taken, Maimie. Going outside. Ring the bell ten minutes after I'm gone. When the servants come, tell them I'm out—blood in the laboratory—ask for policeman. Keep the letter. Very important the letter. One more kiss, Maimie. Good-bye—good-bye—good-bye for ever.'

'Sydney, Sydney, darling Sydney—you will forgive me! You don't hate me!'

'Hate you, Maimie? God forbid, my darling. I love you, I love you—as dearly as ever.'

She held his hand and tried to detain him. With a faint wrench, Sydney dragged it away, and turned, staggering, to the laboratory stairs. He stumbled up them, bleeding as he

went, never noticing even that the kitchen-door stood ajar behind him; up the stairs, and along into the passage; out of the door, and into the cool November evening. The fresh air revived him for a moment He dragged himself on for twenty yards, and then hailed a passing hansom.

The man stopped and looked at him suspiciously. A drunken fare! But, still, a gentleman. With a supreme effort, Sydney lifted himself somehow from the kerb-stone into the cab, and called out in a gurgling voice,

'Regent's Park Hospital.'

Next moment he had fallen back heavily upon the seat, and remained utterly unconscious of all else that happened to him afterward.

When Hannah Gowland came up in answer to the bell ten minutes later, she found Maimie fainting in the laboratory chair, and little pools of blood lying about everywhere on coat and jacket on the floor and table.

CHAPTER XXV.

ANOTHER BLOOD-SPOT.

HANNAH GOWLAND, frail as she looked, lifted her mistress with convulsive energy up in her arms, and carried her safely to her own bedroom. Then she rang the bell with two sharp rings for Lucy, the housemaid.

'Water, water!' she cried, holding up Maimie's head upon the pillow in her arm. 'Bring her water quickly! A little sal volatile! A little brandy or something. She's fainted! She's fainted! The dear soul, she's fainted away at the bare sight of it. The laboratory's lying thick with blood, and Mr. Chevenix isn't about the house anywhere.'

'Blood!' the housemaid cried, starting back suddenly. 'Blood, did you say? Blood, Hannah! Why, what on earth do you think's the matter, then?'

Hannah Gowland pressed a cold wet towel to Maimie's forehead with infinite tenderness as she answered slowly,

'Mr. Chevenix, it's my belief, must have blown himself up accidental or something, with some of those dreadful chemicals of his he's always messing with; and Mrs.

Chevenix, poor little soul, she's gone into the laboratory, and found the blood lying all about the floor and everything, and fainted away outright at the sight of it. Dear little thing! she's that tender-hearted, she couldn't stand the sight of blood, Lucy.'

'But Mr. Chevenix,' Lucy cried excitedly. 'Him!—him! What's become of him, Hannah? Is he lying dead down there in the laboratory?'

Hannah wrung out the towel a second time, and laid it fresh again upon her mistress's forehead, holding the sal volatile anxiously to her face, before she answered curtly in an almost contemptuous tone—

'Him! Oh, him! I'm sure I don't know what's become of him, anyhow. I dare say he's dead, or something. I didn't look about the laboratory for him. I saw the precious soul lying fainting there in the chair by the fireside, and I took her up and carried her off up here in my arms, away from the blood, and the mess, and everything. She's coming round!—she's coming round! The Lord be thanked, she isn't dead yet!'

Lucy ran hastily down the stairs, and along the passage, and out into the laboratory. Blood lay everywhere on the rug and floor, but not a sign of Sydney to be seen anywhere. She glanced hastily at the table by the window. A letter lay upon it, beginning with the words, 'Dearest Maimie.' It was in Sydney's handwriting. She read it hastily. Great Heavens! yes! it was too true. Mr. Chevenix must actually have gone and just shot himself.

She rushed up with the letter excitedly to Hannah.

'See, see!' she cried, 'he's left a letter! He's left a letter! He's shot himself, Hannah! It's that that's killed her.'

Hannah Gowland took the paper from her fellow-servant's hands with languid curiosity, and ran her eyes down it hastily and carelessly. As she did so, her face flushed a sudden crimson, and a deep red spot gathered fierce and feverish in the middle of either sunken cheek.

'He wrote that!' she said, half to herself, folding it up with care, and putting it cautiously into her bosom. 'He wrote that, did he?—the good soul! He did right. I

shouldn't have thought he had it in him! Then she's all safe: she's all safe, thank Heaven! They won't go wrongly suspecting her, anyhow.'

At that moment Maimie opened her eyes dreamily.

'Hannah,' she said, 'Hannah—Hannah, where's Mr. Chevenix? Where is he? How is he?'

Hannah soothed her mistress's hair with her hand.

'I don't know, you poor dear,' she whispered softly. 'But it's all right. You needn't be afraid. He's gone out, I think. Perhaps he'll come back again.'

Lucy ran hurriedly downstairs once more, and began to examine the hall and passage. There were drops of blood lying all along it, and out of the door, and down the door-steps. She came back and whispered to Hannah, 'Mr. Chevenix must have crawled out into the street. There's marks of blood right along the passage to the front door.'

Hannah shook her head impatiently.

'Like enough,' she said. 'He may have gone out and crawled into the street. Perhaps he did, and perhaps he didn't. But what we've got to do now is to look after this poor dear precious lady. People have no right, I say, to go and shoot themselves.'

At the words, Maimie clutched tight hold of her arm, and cried excitedly:

'Sydney, Sydney! oh, where's Sydney! Send round for Jocelyn and Hetty, Hannah. Send round for Jocelyn to come and comfort me.'

'Go, Lucy,' Hannah said in a tone of authority, 'go at once for Mr. and Mrs. Cipriani. Tell them they mustn't lose a single moment. And on the way, you may tell the policeman.'

But as soon as Lucy was well out of the room, she took the folded letter from her breast, read it over again and again with a searching glance, held it carefully out at arm's length, and then once more, with a sigh of relief, slipped it back into the safe keeping of her own bosom.

'No harm will come to you, dear,' she said, leaning over Maimie with a mother's tenderness. 'Mr. Cipriani will soon be here. Let me put a little more water to your forehead.

Poor soul! poor soul! her nerves are all that broken and shattered.'

Hetty was out—detained later than usual at an afternoon tea—and Jocelyn had just finished dressing for dinner when the housemaid called; but he hastily drew on his light dust-coat, and hurried round with all speed, as soon as he heard the terrible message the girl brought him:

'If you please, sir, Mr. Chevenix has just shot himself; and Mrs. Chevenix has fainted away as if she was dead almost.'

In a moment, Jocelyn remembered all that had passed that afternoon—Sydney's depression, his unwillingness to talk, the pistol on the table, Hardy's suspicions. They were too true, then; they were too true! For some incomprehensible reason, Sydney had destroyed himself!

When he reached the house, Maimie was sitting up now in the little boudoir next to her own bedroom, and she rose, pale and white, as he entered at the door, and stretched out her hands eagerly to greet him. How handsome he looked in his evening clothes, she thought to herself, quite parenthetically. Jocelyn always looked best when he was dressed for dinner: the white shirt-front threw up his complexion so. She was glad Hetty hadn't come, too. In such a crisis, another woman's sympathy really rather oppresses one than otherwise. What she needed now was a man's strong arm to grasp and lean upon; advice, assistance, relief from her terror.

'Jocelyn, Jocelyn,' she cried, almost throwing herself upon him, 'have you heard? Have you heard? Sydney's killed himself!'

Jocelyn seated her tenderly upon the sofa, and soothed her white hand in both of his.

'Where is Sydney?' he asked in a soft low voice. 'Where is he, Maimie?—where is he?'

'We don't know, Jocelyn,' Maimie answered, simply, looking through her tears. 'He shot himself in the laboratory—in the laboratory. Oh, the blood—the blood in the laboratory! You never saw anything in your life so terrible—so terrible! And then he went out—he staggered out—we don't know where. We don't know what's become of

him at all. I suppose they've taken him to a hospital, or somewhere.'

Jocelyn started up in astonishment and horror.

'You don't know where he's gone!' he cried excitedly. 'You don't know what's become of him! He's shot himself, and staggered away, and you don't even know where he's gone to?'

'No,' Maimie answered; 'we know nothing—nothing. He just shot himself, and left a letter. I came in, from a walk by myself down Regent Street, and went into the laboratory; and there the blood was lying on the floor. Oh, Jocelyn, the blood! the blood! You never in your life saw anything like it!'

'Where is the letter?' Jocelyn asked almost sternly. 'Give me the letter. Let me see it; let me see it.'

'Hannah has it,' Maimie replied, bursting out afresh into childish sobs. 'Hannah found it down in the laboratory. Give it to him, Hannah. Let him read it; let him read it.'

Hannah handed him the letter in silence, and stood by, watching him jealously, while he read it through with a critical scrutiny.

In a second, his painter's eye lighted instinctively upon the round red blood-spot near the end of the letter. It was still fresh—fresh and scarlet-looking—and he noticed at once with his professional instinct, what another man might easily have overlooked, that the ink of the letter lay above the blot, not below it, as it would have done if the blot had been splashed there by accident after the letter was written. He gazed at the sheet of paper with profound curiosity, and then he turned and looked hard at Maimie. Maimie winced and trembled a little as Jocelyn looked at her: he was sure she was frightened—not merely terrified at Sydney's death, but distinctly frightened at his close scrutiny. What could be the meaning of her sudden shrinking? He could see that she shrank from him, not merely with the lasting terror of this sudden misfortune, but with a special alarm when he looked so close into the writing of the letter. She was frightened somehow on her own account; of that he felt certain: a painter of passion learns to read the emotions of others like an open book upon their speaking countenances.

It was terror of *him* that Maimie exhibited ; terror of *him*—not merely terror of the deadly letter.

'Leave the room,' he said with authority to Hannah. 'I shall take charge of this letter.' He looked hard at Maimie. 'It will be wanted at the inquest.'

The red spot loomed again fiercely in Hannah's cheek as Jocelyn spoke to her ; but she obeyed sullenly, and shut the door after her, with the reluctant air of one who yields against her will to an overpowering necessity.

Jocelyn rose, as soon as she was gone, and slowly turned the key in the door. Then he took the letter deliberately over to the gaslight by the table. For a second Maimie's heart bounded violently ; she thought Jocelyn was going to burn it—her one piece of exculpatory evidence. But Jocelyn only took his little lens, such as painters use, from his waistcoat pocket, and gazed intently at the spot and at the writing. Yes, yes, there could be no denying it ! The letters were written right across the blood-spot. In other words, the spot must certainly have been upon the paper before the letters were written over it. Sydney Chevenix must have penned that note after, not before, the fatal shot was fired that killed him. Why, then, should he say, 'I am about to take my own life,' when for all practical purposes he had at that moment already actually taken it ? Why thus prevaricate, with his own blood positively flowing from the wound he had himself inflicted upon his own body ? Sydney was always a truthful and an upright man ; why should he die with an obvious and gratuitous lie thus deliberately traced on tell-tale paper by his trembling fingers ?

Great God !—great God ! Could that be the meaning of it ?

With one of those sudden gleams of intuition which sometimes break upon sensitive men like a lightning flash, at a great crisis, the whole truth burst at a rush instantaneously and wildly upon Jocelyn Cipriani's bewildered brain. Ah ! yes, ah ! yes, he saw it all now, as if by some subtle transference of impression. Why Maimie should ever have wished to shoot her own husband he couldn't as yet, to be sure, even imagine. Whether she had done it accidentally or intentionally he hadn't at first the remotest conception. He only knew, in some vague, indefinite, instinctive fashion, that

Maimie had somehow shot Sydney, and that Sydney, to save her, had afterwards traced with his dying hands that short and curt exculpatory letter. But that that was the true explanation of the mysterious blood-stain and of Maimie's own abject and terrified manner he felt wholly, absolutely, instinctively certain.

He glanced at Maimie once more from the table, as she sat there crouching, with her face in her hands, and read in every curve of her bent shoulders and trembling back her shrinking, infantile personal terror for her own security.

Jocelyn folded up the letter carefully, put it in his pocket, and stepped across the room again to where Maimie sat, cowering like a child upon the sofa.

'Maimie,' he said very softly, seating himself beside her, and holding her hand, 'Maimie! I must go and find out about Sydney. This is a sad business—a terrible business. I understand it all. The first thing to do is to discover whether Sydney's dead or living. If he's dead, you would have been left under the shadow of a terrible doubt, but for poor Sydney's explanatory letter. But don't be afraid. Sydney's letter will entirely relieve you from all danger of unjust suspicion. It was a noble thing of Sydney to write it. I will take very, very great care of that priceless letter. It will save you entirely—entirely—entirely.'

Maimie nestled up close to him in an agony of fear.

'Oh, Jocelyn,' she cried, 'you mustn't go, you mustn't go, you really mustn't go and leave me. I can't be left alone; I shall kill myself if I'm left—kill myself if you forsake me. It is too terrible—too terrible. Yes! yes! it was a wonderfully noble thing of Sydney to write it!'

As she spoke, her eyes met Jocelyn's for a second, and she saw, with a sudden intuitive glance just like his own, that Jocelyn knew or suspected everything. She shrank back from him alarmed as soon as she realized it, and uttered once more a little broken cry of inarticulate terror. But Jocelyn seized the hand she had withdrawn and soothed it tenderly.

'You needn't be afraid of *me*, Maimie,' he said as he soothed it. 'I am true as steel, firm as rock, silent as the grave, dear. No; don't speak; don't try to confess; don't tell me anything. What I guess, I guess, and the rest

goes best without the saying. Whatever it was, Sydney has forgiven it, and Sydney has taken care you shall not suffer for it. Where I once love, I love for ever. I must go out now and look for poor Sydney.'

'But Jocelyn, Jocelyn, the blood-spot!—the blood-spot! I saw you looking at it there with your little pocket lens. Do you think they'll be able to make anything out of it?' And with another frantic burst of childish tears, she threw herself wildly upon Jocelyn's bosom.

'The letter shall be produced at the inquest, Maimie, if there ever is one,' Jocelyn answered quietly; 'and when it's produced, the blood-spot shall not show upon it any longer. I know how to manage that easily enough. The spot shall tell no tales upon you, Maimie. You remember the stuff Sydney gave me to take the stains out of my water-colours when I cut my finger? I can take this blotch here out with that. Keep a thing for seven years, they say, and it's sure in the end to turn up useful. Do you recollect what I told you that day? Accidents *will* happen, I told you, Maimie, and now you see one has actually happened.'

'But, Jocelyn,' Maimie cried, flinging her arms fiercely around him, 'you don't mean to say they'll call it a mur——'

Jocelyn clapped his hand firmly upon her lips.

'Not a word of that!' he whispered low in her ear in a stern undertone. 'For God's sake, not a word of that even to me, alone here, Maimie. Keep your own counsel; it's better so. We will never speak any more to one another while we live about it.'

Maimie clasped him madly in her arms.

'Oh, Jocelyn, dear Jocelyn!' she cried passionately, 'what should I ever have done without you here this evening? You will stand by me! You will stand by me! You will not betray me! You will help me out of this trouble, won't you, my darling?'

Jocelyn pressed her hand quietly.

'Speak low, Maimie,' he said; 'for Heaven's sake, speak low and gently. If you were overheard, it might go hard against you. Yes, dear little woman, I will stand by you always. Nobody shall ever hurt a hair of your head, if I can do aught in any way to save you.'

'Then you don't hate me?' Maimie cried once more in a sobbing whisper. 'You're not terribly angry with me?' You don't think you ought to cast me off for ever!'

Jocelyn smiled a calm, philosophic smile.

'Maimie,' he said, 'you'd better say no more about it. I understand you, and I will speak of it to nobody. But you'd better make no confidences to others—to any one—to any one!'

'Not even to Adrian?' Maimie asked innocently.

Jocelyn started. In another flash, the purpose, the meaning, the motive of the act burst in upon him irresistibly, with intuitive conviction.

'Adrian!' he cried. 'Why, what about Adrian—Adrian Pym!—is he in London?'

'He was this afternoon,' Maimie blurted out at once with perfect simplicity. 'I met him and talked with him on Primrose Hill about four o'clock, Jocelyn.'

Jocelyn rose and moved towards the door.

'I'm going to look after Sydney,' he murmured sternly.

Maimie sprang after him with a startled cry of misery and terror.

'Oh, darling!' she whispered, 'Jocelyn, dear Jocelyn! don't leave me alone here to kill myself with fear, will you? I can't do without some man to support me! I'm only a woman—only a poor, weak, frightened woman! I can't bear it by myself! I can't bear it!—I can't bear it! Don't leave me alone, without somebody strong to help me and comfort me!'

'The first thing we must do,' Jocelyn answered, drawing a deep breath and disengaging himself with quiet strength from her twining arms, 'is to find out whether poor Sydney is now dead or living. Until we know for certain about all that, we can do nothing and arrange nothing.'

'Then, Jocelyn, Jocelyn, if you won't stop with me here yourself to comfort me, will you send for Adrian?—send for Adrian! I *must* have somebody here to support me!'

'What's his address?' Jocelyn asked coldly. 'Where's he stopping?'

'He generally stops at the Paddington Hotel,' Maimie answered with a sob.

'I'll send a commissionaire at once to fetch him,' Jocelyn rejoined, as he turned the key once more in the door. 'He shall be here immediately. And as it won't be well that Adrian should stop with you in the house alone, I'll send Hetty round to sit with you also.'

'Oh, Jocelyn, how kind of you! You're always so thoughtful! But you won't go!—you won't leave me! Oh, Jocelyn, Jocelyn! if you're really going, before you leave—just this once—this once only—you won't go away without ever kissing me?'

Jocelyn stooped down and took her plump white fingers caressingly in his own.

'Maimie,' he said, playing with them affectionately, 'I'm very fond of you, and I'll stand by you faithfully, whatever happens; you may rely upon me not to be shaken by good report or evil report, by right or wrong, by fact or by fancy: but I mustn't kiss you; I can't kiss you; I won't kiss you. Not even to-night, darling; not even to-night. I must never, never again kiss you!'

He turned the key resolutely in the lock, and opened the door of the little boudoir.

Outside, Hannah Gowland stood mounting guard, silent and watchful, over her mistress's door, with a suspicious eye bent angrily, as he passed, on Jocelyn Cipriani.

As for Maimie, left alone for awhile with her terrors in the boudoir, she flung herself back upon the sofa in a fresh agony of tears, and muttered audibly between her tempestuous sobs:

'He doesn't love me! He doesn't care for me! He wouldn't kiss me! He wouldn't be kind to me! I shall be left alone, with nobody to comfort me! Not even to-night: he wouldn't kiss me.'

'My poor darling!' Hannah Gowland cried, springing hastily to her rescue. 'He has been frightening you!—he has been frightening you! The wicked man! he has been talking to you and frightening you. But they shan't hurt you; they shan't hurt you. Whoever else turns against you, I shall stand by you, I shall be with you. My poor darling! he shall never frighten you!'

Maimie turned, as was Maimie's wont, and buried her

head caressingly for the moment on the first shoulder that then and there offered support and consolation.

'Thank you, Hannah,' she murmured through her tears; 'thank you; thank you. It's very kind of you, dear. I hope Jocelyn will send round Adrian. Sydney, Sydney, my darling Sydney! I wonder what on earth has ever become of my poor dear unfortunate Sydney!'

And all this time Sydney Chevenix lay unconscious, between life and death, hanging by a thread, in a ward of the Regent's Park Hospital.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MURDER?

How Sydney got there, he never knew. He could remember staggering out from the laboratory steps to the front door, and hailing the cab, and falling back senseless upon the padded cushions; but when he next recovered consciousness for a few minutes, he found himself lying on a bed in the accident ward, with his wounds all properly dressed, and a house-surgeon looking down critically upon him with professional indifference. How often he had stood and looked so in medical unconcern at an 'interesting case' in his student days at the Middlesex Hospital; how little he ever thought then that he himself would be so looked upon at such a moment by a brother-surgeon!

He couldn't speak. His returning consciousness was still far too faint and feeble for that. He could only lie with eyes and mouth half open, listlessly gazing up through his eyelids at the young surgeon, and hearing in some vague uncertain buzz the conversation that was passing between him and the nurse at the bedside. Indefinite sounds, floating faintly through his dazed head, they all seemed, and yet his vivid interest in the subject of their talk made him listen intently, with whatever intelligence he had left him for the moment, to the solitary scraps he could now and again overhear of their whispered colloquy.

'Not suicide . . . impossible to be self-inflicted . . . Ball must have passed in at the back, beside the shoulder . . .

out below the right lung . . . Very serious.' Those were the first stray scattered snatches he caught of the young surgeon's running comment.

Sydney Chevenix shut his mouth hard, and drew a long breath in terrible trepidation. Then they had already discovered, as he knew they would, that his wasn't really a case of suicide! There would be no saving Maimie upon that simple plea. Whatever came, he must manage to pick up strength enough to tell some absurd cock-and-bull story about his fastening the pistol and pulling it with a string, in order to give it the appearance of an accident. Yes, yes, at all hazards he must save Maimie, darling Maimie—Maimie, Maimie, Maimie, Maimie! And then his mind began once more to wander deliriously.

He was recalled to consciousness again the next moment by hearing the nurse answer confidently:

'But then there was no bullet-mark, you see, sir, in the ulster. He must have fired off the pistol first, and somehow put on his coat afterward and staggered out to a cab before he fainted. He had no jacket or waistcoat on, but only the ulster above the shirt, with the bullet-mark in it.'

With an immense effort Sydney Chevenix gasped out, 'I did!' and then relapsed once more for a while into blank unconsciousness.

Five minutes later he became dreamily aware, yet another time, of voices by the bedside, and heard the surgeon ask the nurse, 'Have you found out what's his name and address yet?'

'There was a card case in the pocket of the ulster,' the nurse answered, 'with a lot of cards in it. Here's one: "Mr. Sydney Chevenix, 27, Beaumont Terrace, Regent's Park, N.W." We've sent off at once to the address on the cards to make all inquiries from the people there about him.'

Sydney drew another deep breath. Then Maimie would soon be coming to see him. That was bad—bad for Maimie. He hoped something would turn up to prevent her from coming. If she came, she would for certain begin to cry, and talk, and upbraid herself foolishly, and ask his forgiveness, and then it would all come out hopelessly. The terror and anxiety of that horrid thought made him swoon again into unconsciousness for a minute; yet, even in the midst of his

very swoon, he was vaguely aware all the time, as in a hideous nightmare, of some terrible danger overhanging Maimie. Maimie, Maimie, Maimie, Maimie! Till that awful hour, he had never fully known before how profoundly he loved her. In spite of everything, he loved her unutterably.

If only he could speak and tell the hospital people all about it—not the real story of course, but the false exculpatory one, of how he had tied the pistol to the table, and pulled a string, and shot himself with it! But his tongue somehow seemed to be fairly paralyzed; he couldn't utter a single sound. He could only lie and think it over helplessly.

And Maimie!—dear darling Maimie. How terribly she must be feeling, alone at Twenty-seven! He hoped Hetty Cipriani was there with her. Poor child, she did it in a moment of impulse: she never meant it—it was the merest accident. And then to think that, if he were to die, they would try to hang that sweet little angel for it! Wretches! monsters! The bare idea was ten thousand times more agonizing than death itself could be. How happily he could die, if only he knew that he left dear Maimie safe behind him.

Fortunately he had made a will in her favour when they were first married; he executed it on his wedding-day. She would be left happy and well provided for. And then the letter—the letter would exculpate her. She would marry Adrian Pym, whom she seemed to love better than her husband, and who would be a good husband to her. Oh, yes, if only the coroner's jury would believe the letter, Maimie might yet live very happily.

And then a horrible thought struck him suddenly. Suppose, after all, he were not to die, but live, and improve, and get well again? Why, that would be almost worse than the other way. He could go back himself, of course, and love Maimie as well as ever: what mattered a mere passing impulsive action on the part of a child such as Maimie? But how could she ever come back to him and love him? How could she ever feel the same towards him again? How could she ever manage to forget that she had tried to—well, to get rid of him? How could she forget the fact she had told him that she loved Adrian Pym better than she loved him, her husband, Sydney Chevenix?

Yes, yes, it was too terrible. Come what might, for Maimie's sake, he must try to die. He mustn't live to prove her misery. She never could be happy with him again. She never could get over her natural feeling that he must distrust her, and suspect her, and dislike her, and be angry with her. He would only blight and spoil her life—he, who had no thought except to make her happy. Come what might, he must manage to die, and leave Maimie free to marry Adrian.

Come what might, he must die! he must die! He mustn't stand in the way for Maimie, Maimie, Maimie, Maimie!

It rang in his ears: and then he relapsed again.

By-and-by, he woke up once more. Raising his eyes, with his head thrown back loosely on the pillow, he saw a number on top of the bed—it was seventeen—and his own card stuck in a little sliding metal frame just beneath it.

Somebody dim was standing beside him—it was Jocelyn Cipriani he knew a minute later—and whispering something to the nurse at the bedside.

'Tried to commit suicide in his own laboratory,' Jocelyn was saying in a low voice; '. . . well-known man of science and distinguished chemist; . . . left a letter behind for his wife, to say he was going to shoot himself. . . . Seems to have repented of it afterwards and tried to bandage himself. . . . Poor wife lying at home utterly prostrated. . . . Far too ill to come here this evening. . . . Doctor says she mustn't be disturbed, or moved, on any account. . . . Thought I'd better come round to identify him, just for form's sake. . . . Doesn't think it at all probable he'll live till morning; h'm, doesn't he?'

Thank God for that!—thank God for that! The surgeon didn't think it probable he'd live till morning!

Then, at any rate, he wouldn't live to blight Maimie's happiness—Maimie's happiness! Maimie, Maimie, Maimie, Maimie! How it rung in his ears still. The whole universe had narrowed itself down now to one little whirling, eddying circle, and of that circle Maimie was the centre. Sydney Chevenix's mind revolved over and over again in his delirious frenzy on that one solitary broken pivot.

Soon the nurse moved away for a minute to another bed-

side. Jocelyn Ciprani stood still, leaning over him in silence, and watching his face with profound interest. Presently, Sydney's eyes half opened for a moment, and Jocelyn, looking down, saw part of the pupil gazing vacantly upward, with the fixed blank stare of total unconsciousness. Next instant, the pupil had rolled slowly round with deliberate effort, and was concentrated in a meaning, imploring look straight upon his own wavering eyes above it. Jocelyn Cipriani started suddenly.

'Sydney,' he whispered in a low, frightened tone, 'are you awake? Are you conscious? Do you know it's me? Have you anything to tell me?'

Sydney's lips moved convulsively. He could hardly speak. As in a ghastly dream, he seemed to be tongue-tied. At last, with a terrible mumbling and mouthing, he brought his parched and feverish throat in some dim fashion to frame the words he was trembling and gasping to utter.

'Jocelyn,' he cried, in an agony of effort, 'save Maimie! save Maimie!' And then his eyes closed again automatically.

Jocelyn grasped the bloodless hand that lay now outside the coverlet, and pressed it hard with a sympathetic pressure.

'You're a noble fellow, Sydney,' he answered with unwonted emotion, the tears rising fast to his eyes meanwhile; 'you're a very noble fellow. You've done your best to screen her and save her. She hasn't told me, but I suspect and guess the whole truth. I've seen your letter, and I know the meaning of it. Don't be afraid. You may die happy. Leave her to us. We will save her still, in spite of all, with the aid of your letter.'

Sydney was too weak to speak again, but Jocelyn felt a slight return of his pressure from the bloodless hand; and the tears fairly fell from his swimming eyes as he looked down in pity on the pallid eyelids closing below him. Sydney's lower jaw relaxed once more, and Jocelyn thought for a moment he was really dead. But no—his pulse still beat feebly; he had only relapsed yet another time into temporary unconsciousness.

Jocelyn Cipriani bent down tenderly and kissed with reverent awe, like one unworthy to touch it, the white hand

upon the coarse hospital counterpane. Then he went out slowly, muttering to the nurse as he passed:

'I shall come again, to ask after Mr. Chevenix, to-morrow morning.'

CHAPTER XXVII.

OR SUICIDE?

WOULD Sydney live, or would he die? That was now the great question. For if he lived, it was merely an accident—an attempted suicide; but if he died, as Jocelyn knew full well, it was murder—murder! and Maimie was a murderess!

On the doorstep, as Jocelyn went out on his search for Sydney, he had met the messenger from the Regent's Park Hospital, who told him briefly where Sydney had been taken; and close behind came the doctor from the next street, brought round officiously to see Maimie, by Lucy, the housemaid. Jocelyn turned back with the doctor for a moment, to discover whether Maimie would accompany him to the hospital; but the mere suggestion of once more facing her dying husband, after all that had happened, threw Maimie into such a fresh paroxysm of hysterical weeping and deadly faintness, that the doctor promptly vetoed the proceeding, and sent Jocelyn off alone on his mission of inquiry. An hour later, the painter returned in breathless haste, telling Maimie that Sydney was still alive and doing fairly, and that he would go round to inquire for him again at the hospital early in the morning. The surgeon thought he might just possibly live till morning. The news that Sydney was still living pacified Maimie a little for the moment, and she cried now more silently and naturally, as well as with less of terror in her weeping, than at the first outset.

Meanwhile Hetty had arrived to keep Maimie company in her sorrow, as Jocelyn had promised; and a commissionaire, hurriedly despatched in a cab, had brought round Adrian Pym in hot haste from the Great Western Hotel at Paddington.

Jocelyn saw him first alone in the drawing-room.

'This is a bad business, Adrian,' he said at once, making no secret with him about the whole affair. 'Of course, the messenger told you everything—that Sydney has shot himself, and Maimie's upstairs crying her eyes out. Well, here's the letter for you to see, that Sydney wrote and left behind him.'

Adrian Pym read it through carefully, in his calm, self-restrained manner, and then handed it back again to the observant painter with a deathly pallor on his cold, clear countenance. In a moment he, too, jumped at a conclusion of his own; how could he conceivably do otherwise, when he remembered those terrible words of Maimie's that very afternoon? 'If anything should ever happen to dear old Sydney, you know, Adrian!' Great Heavens! what could this sudden realization of her prophetic words so quickly mean? Was it possible to doubt that the prophecy had wrought out in Maimie's rash hands its own fulfilment?

Adrian Pym gasped horribly for breath, and looked hard at Jocelyn in dire perplexity.

'Well,' he said at last, after a long silence, 'and what do you make of it, yourself, Cipriani?'

'I've been to the hospital,' Jocelyn answered evasively, 'and I've seen Chevenix, and the surgeon there thinks it just possible he may yet recover.'

Adrian Pym drew a long breath.

'He may yet recover,' he repeated mechanically; 'he may yet recover. The surgeon thinks it just possible he may yet recover.'

'Yes,' Jocelyn went on, eyeing him hard; 'and, in that case, of course everything might, no doubt, in the end, be arranged the same as usual.'

Adrian stared at him vacantly.

'The same as usual,' he muttered as in a dream; 'the same as usual. Quite so—quite so. But what in the name of Heaven, Cipriani, can have made . . . Chevenix . . . think . . . of shooting himself?'

By the pause, and the sudden jerk he gave at the name, Jocelyn knew, as well as if he could see by magic into Adrian's heart, that Adrian was really thinking to himself, 'What can have made Maimie shoot him, and what can have

made Sydney afterwards write such a letter as that to exculpate her?'

'It all hangs upon his living or dying now,' Jocelyn continued abstractedly, as if he hardly knew what he was saying. 'If he lives, all will be well; if he dies, we must try our best——'

'Our best to do what?' Adrian interposed eagerly, as Jocelyn hesitated with deliberate adroitness for a second before finishing his sentence.

'Our best to make Mrs. Chevenix happy,' Jocelyn continued significantly.

Adrian Pym drew back in alarm, and looked hard at the painter, not without trembling. Had this man, then, arrived intuitively at the same suspicion as he himself had? Did he, too, guess with his Italian astuteness that Maimie had played no minor part in this suspected tragedy? But no, no; he was over-suspicious. Conscience makes cowards of us all. Even he himself hadn't really any good grounds for his hasty idea. Sydney had written with his own hand that he was going to kill himself. And why on earth should Sydney write that, if it was really Maimie who was going to kill him? After all, how ridiculous to suppose that Maimie had said to her husband, 'I mean to shoot you, my dear. Please sit down and write a letter at once to screen me!' Sydney Chevenix was doubtless the most indulgent and most infatuated of husbands—so Jocelyn had told him—but that was really beyond even Sydney Chevenix's utmost span of infatuation.

Jocelyn eyed him closely still. Adrian Pym, strong-minded as he was, quailed and fidgeted a little before that frank, open, inquiring gaze. He didn't exactly like Jocelyn's severe scrutiny. He felt that the painter was scanning his face with the trained eye of a reader of emotion. If only it had been anybody but Jocelyn Cipriani! Adrian did his best to look wholly unconcerned, and, like all men who make that most hopeless of attempts, failed egregiously in the impossible effort.

Presently Jocelyn broke the awkward silence.

'You met Maimie this afternoon, I believe, up on Primrose Hill, didn't you, Adrian?'

Adrian, in spite of his habitual self-control, gave a visible start, and then with equal maladroitness repressed it visibly.

'I did,' he answered, with ill-concealed agitation. 'How . . . how did you come to know of that, pray, Cipriani? I mean to say . . . what the devil . . . that is, rather, I should like to know who ever can have told you so?'

'Maimie mentioned to me that she'd seen you there,' Jocelyn continued in a musing voice, as though it were an abstract fact, to which he attached not the slightest practical importance; 'and she asked me to send for you to the Paddington Hotel. Indeed, I shouldn't otherwise have known your address, or even that you were up in town this evening.'

Adrian could have cursed in his heart his own childish clumsiness in letting Jocelyn see so plainly how annoyed and frightened he was to learn that the painter had heard of their accidental meeting. How foolish of Maimie ever to have mentioned it; how many thousand times more foolish of himself to have betrayed such tell-tale and ill-timed agitation!

'It was kind of you to let me know so quickly,' he said, with awkward politeness, aware all the time that Jocelyn's keen eye was still riveted upon him. 'I . . . I am glad if I can be of any service to . . . to Mrs. Chevenix in her great trouble.'

Jocelyn held the fatal letter still unfolded in his hands.

'Yes,' he said, glancing casually sideways at the blood-spot; 'we must all do our best to . . . to save Maimie from any possible unpleasant consequences. It was a fortunate thing that Chevenix wrote this letter beforehand. A man who intends to commit suicide owes it as a moral duty to others to put his intentions plainly in writing. It prevents all unjust suspicions. Had it not been for this letter'—he paused significantly.

'Well,' Adrian said, with marked impatience; 'had it not been for this letter——'

'Why, then, no doubt,' Jocelyn went on quietly, 'a great deal of unjust suspicion might easily have fallen upon Mrs. Chevenix. . . . We speak as between friends, Adrian. I know you are a staunch friend of our poor little Maimie's. . . . If it hadn't been for this letter, I must say it would

have been very natural indeed to suspect. . . . You follow my meaning?'

'Impossible!—impossible!' Adrian cried, trembling, and breaking out all over into a cold perspiration.

'I've just returned from the Regent's Park Hospital, you know,' Jocelyn went on, calmly, diverging all at once into a new subject with premeditated cruelty, 'and there I saw poor Sydney Chevenix. He was very weak, and almost unconscious; in fact, the nurse told me he'd been quite unconscious several times for many minutes together. But he opened his eyes a little when he saw me, and seemed as if he were muttering and struggling hard to say something that was burdening his conscience. So I bent down my ear close to his lips, and heard him murmur in an agony of effort, "Jocelyn, Jocelyn, save Maimie, save Maimie!" How very singular he should say that, Adrian! Why on earth should he ask me at such a moment to save Maimie?'

Adrian Pym paced up and down the room excitedly, like a caged tiger.

'Cipriani, Cipriani!' he said at last, 'are you doing this on purpose? Are you trying deliberately and intentionally to play upon me?'

Jocelyn answered only with an evasive smile:

'There are subjects, Adrian,' he said, stroking his brown beard with a meditative hand, 'which it is better always to approach obliquely. This is one of them. Have you happened to notice the blot here, by the way, on this sheet of paper?'

Adrian snatched the letter from his firm grasp in a sudden fit of exasperation and terror.

'Yes,' he answered; 'yes, I noticed it, of course. What of it, then? I suppose it got splashed on when Sydney shot himself.'

'Not at all,' Jocelyn answered, coldly and demonstratively. 'That's not a splash: every painter knows at once the difference in shape and effect between drops and splashes. That's a drop, Adrian—a drop from a wound; and, what's more, it was there—I don't mind telling you—before ever the letter was written.'

He spoke low, solemnly and impressively, and Adrian

could see that he meant to attach great importance to the suggestion he made with so much significance; but, clever as the Oxford tutor was, his mind worked less rapidly than Jocelyn's, and he couldn't immediately catch at the full implication of that little tell-tale fragment of circumstantial evidence.

'Well,' he said, in a dazed and puzzled voice, avoiding Jocelyn's eyes as well as he was able, 'I suppose Chevenix may have written the letter, then, after he shot himself.'

'Precisely,' Jocelyn replied. 'That's just it. He wrote the letter after he shot himself. Look at the words as they run distinctly right across the blot, Adrian. Don't you see quite unmistakably that the ink lies on top of the blood-spot, not underneath it? If you can't see that with your own eyes, take my lens here, and examine it carefully.'

Adrian scanned the letter through the lens with close attention.

'Well,' he said, handing it back at last to Jocelyn with a terrified face, 'what do you think of the matter, Cipriani?'

The painter spoke slowly and distinctly, with a long pause between each sentence:

'If Chevenix dies, there will have to be an inquest. . . . The letter must, of course, be produced in evidence there. . . . Chevenix implored me with what I believe to be his dying breath to save Maimie. . . . I shall do my best to carry out his wishes. . . . I can remove the blood-stain from the face of the letter with a chemical, which will not destroy the writing. . . . In case of his death, I shall remove it so before the inquest. . . . Except that blood-stain, there is absolutely not one tittle of evidence against . . . against Maimie. The letter alone will entirely exculpate her. . . . No shadow of suspicion even will ever fall upon her.'

Adrian gasped a moment for more breath.

'Then you are with us, Cipriani?' he asked anxiously; 'with us, not against us?'

'I am with you in the desire to save Mrs. Chevenix from any unpleasant consequences of this unfortunate accident,' Jocelyn answered quietly. 'Of course I am with you. What else do you take me for? A private detective, or a public executioner? I should fancy no one who called himself a

man could have any other wish in such a matter except to save poor little Maimie.'

Adrian paced the room once more in solemn silence for another minute.

'I think we understand each other,' he said at last, turning cautiously with a look of appeal to Jocelyn. 'Am I right in supposing that we quite understand each other?'

Jocelyn nodded a mute assent.

'Yes,' he added, after a pause; 'we quite understand each other. And that being so, the less we say to each other in words upon the subject in future, the better, Adrian. . . . One word more; one question only. I ask it merely in the desire to serve you. Was this matter premeditated? Was it the result of a preconcerted arrangement between you? Or did it merely happen, so far as you know, on the spur of the moment?'

'It was as great a thunder-clap to me as to you,' Adrian answered truthfully. 'I knew nothing about it—absolutely nothing—until I heard the first news of it from the messenger you sent me. I believe it must have been the result of a momentary impulse — a momentary impulse — a terrible, terrible one.'

'I'm glad of that,' Jocelyn replied with calm confidence; 'very glad of it. She will have less to reproach herself with. And now that we've settled this matter between us, and know exactly where we both stand, suppose we go upstairs at once to poor Maimie.' He paused as he turned the handle of the door, and then murmured softly, 'You're a barrister, of course? I believe the legal term is misprision, isn't it?'

Adrian started.

'Yes,' he answered, with a shudder; 'misprision of murder. But if we conspire together to destroy the evidence by removing the blood-stain, that would render us accessories after the fact, and liable, of course, to penal servitude.'

'Good!' Jocelyn answered. 'We have some guarantee at least, then, of mutual confidence. That will do, Adrian. Let us never again, as long as we live, mention the subject to one another.'

But, all this while, Sydney Chevenix lay still as before, unconscious and silent, hovering for ever between life and death, in a ward of the Regent's Park Hospital.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FIRE!

They sat up late that night with Maimie, who had fallen now into a regular fever, and was moaning terribly on the boudoir sofa.

About half-past four in the morning a curious glare in the sky to southward arrested Jocelyn Cipriani's attention even through the blind and in those terrible circumstances.

He went to the window and looked out.

'What is it?' Adrian asked him, below his breath.

'A fire somewhere,' Jocelyn answered carelessly, and thought no more for the moment about it.

But presently Hannah Gowland appeared at the door, and with a scared white face, more ghost-like than ever, beckoned Jocelyn imperiously out of the room.

'Sir, sir,' she cried, 'for Heaven's sake don't tell her—don't tell her; it'd break her heart—it'd kill her, it'd kill her. The fire's at the hospital where they've taken Mr. Chevenix!'

'How do you know?' Jocelyn asked in tremulous astonishment.

'I've been out to ask,' the girl answered confidently; 'and a policeman told me so. He said it was at the Regent's Park Hospital.'

Jocelyn stole back softly into the boudoir.

'Adrian,' he whispered, 'you must come with me and see this thing out. The fire is at the Regent's Park Hospital, where they've taken Chevenix. Hetty, you must stop with her and take good care of her. We may be back before very long. Come along, Adrian, we must go and look into it.'

Maimie raised herself up on the sofa.

'You're not both going out at once, Adrian?' she cried passionately. 'You're not both going off together, are you, and going to leave me here alone with Hetty?'

'We must go and inquire about Sydney,' Jocelyn answered, pacifying her. 'We . . . we think there may be some possible change in Sydney's condition.'

They hailed a passing hansom in hot haste, and drove as near as the horse could take them to the scene of the fire. A couple of hundred yards away or more, they were stopped in their course by the surging throng of curious onlookers. Jocelyn jumped out, closely followed by Adrian, and pushed his way sturdily through the dense crowd. The firemen were playing upon one ward of the hospital, and a ring of policemen kept off the crowd in every direction.

Jocelyn passed the policemen in his authoritative way.

'Friends of a patient,' he said with an air of command. 'Come to look after him by special permission.'

The nearest policeman nodded acquiescence and let them pass on. He saw that Jocelyn was in evening dress under his light dust coat, and evening dress is a universal passport under all possible circumstances with the London policeman.

They mounted the great white stairs of the hospital. There for a minute or two all was hurry and confusion. Red tongues of flame leaped madly out of the first-floor windows, and licked up the wood-work of the frames outside. Patients on beds were being hastily removed, in panic and terror, from the burning ward to places of safety. It was an awful sight, that terrific fire in such painful circumstances; men on crutches hobbling along down the corridors, eager and terror-stricken; women with clasped white hands carried helpless on mattresses; children, ghastly pale with sickness and with fear, borne hurriedly on in the big rough arms of firemen and of nurses. Everywhere smoke, and glare, and bustle, black clouds and red battling together in a terrible struggle for their helpless victims. Half suffocated by the flames, Jocelyn and Adrian pushed their way into the body of the building. It was some time before they could find anyone at leisure to answer their inquiries; but the painter saw at a glance for himself that the fire had broken out in the very ward in which he had already visited Sydney Chevenix earlier that evening.

By-and-by the firemen got the flames in some degree under; the fire slowly ceased to spread; and the last embers were

finally extinguished by the play of the engines. The two visitors mounted then unobstructed to the ward where Jocelyn had last seen and spoken with Sydney.

'Can you tell me,' he asked of the first nurse he met, prying tentatively among the charred and smoking ruins, 'what has become of a patient of the name of Sydney Chevenix?'

'Chevenix,' the woman repeated slowly, 'Chevenix, Chevenix! In the accident ward? Why, yes, that's him that's lying up dead there—him as they didn't move at all when the fire broke out. He died about half-an-hour before, and the fire caught first just on his bed-clothes. I expect he's burnt dreadful with the flames in the ward by this time.'

Horrified at the news, Jocelyn walked on, picking his way with care among the charred timbers and wet ashes on which the firemen had just been playing, and approached cautiously the little iron bed near the corner of the ward to which the woman had pointed. He remembered the number—it was seventeen—and the figures were painted on a little iron space above the bed-head. A visiting-card, singed and blackened by the fire, but still quite legible in spite of its smoky covering, was slipped into a small metal frame for the patient's name close below it. Jocelyn glanced at it as he passed to the bedside: it bore the familiar name and address, 'Mr. Sydney Chevenix, 27, Beaumont Terrace, Regent's Park, N.W.'

The other bedsteads about were stripped entirely of their beds and bed-clothes, hastily carried away with their inmates by the firemen and nurses on the first alarm when the fire was discovered. But this one had been left unstripped when the surrounding ones were emptied, because it contained merely a corpse, and, in the hideous scramble of the nurses and porters to save the living, the one dead man had been unavoidably neglected.

Jocelyn Cipriani brushed away with his hand from the body the moist and clinging ashes of the sheet and coverlet. The sight that met his eyes beneath was indeed a sickening one. The corpse, though unspeakably burnt and distorted, still showed clear evidence that it must have been really a corpse before the first outbreak of the fire could have taken

place, for a cloth, tied tightly around the under jaw to keep it from dropping, remained but little burnt beneath the chin, in spite of the flames; and though the eyebrows and lashes were now completely singed away, the lids were closed by some officious hand—not open and staring as in the natural condition. But the features were so hideously charred and livid with the fire as to be scarcely recognizable, and the hair on the head was matted and frizzled with the intense heat of the enveloping flames. Jocelyn bared the lean and blackened breast: the raw bullet-wound and the clotted blood on the bandages had partially preserved the body from the fire; and much of the flesh here was unburnt, though most of the sheet, coverlet, and blanket was reduced to ashes. As for the feather-bed beneath him, it was scorched and burnt on the outside only; its own thickness and the weight of the corpse had saved it from the power of the consuming flames. An ominous smell of burnt petroleum pervaded the whole room, and fragments of a glass lamp, scattered on the floor, showed plainly to the painter's observant eye what had been the origin of the whole catastrophe.

Jocelyn Cipriani gazed for a second, horror-struck, upon the hideous figure thus awfully presented to his swimming sight; then he turned away his face in natural disgust from the sickening object, and let his philosophy so far forget itself for the time as to brush the tears hastily from his dim eyes. As for Adrian Pym, he drew back with a fearful shudder from the horrible remains of the man whose death he had so unwittingly been instrumental in causing.

'Jocelyn, Jocelyn,' he cried instinctively, clutching the painter's arm to support himself from falling, 'this is too horrible, too horrible! Don't tell her of this. She must never know it. We must keep it from her, whatever happens. The sight would poison her life for ever. She may hear he is dead, but she must never know a word about the fire.'

'Never,' Jocelyn answered very firmly.

Adrian Pym approached the corpse once more, with a blanched face of terrible interest. It seemed to possess for him some horrid fascination.

'Dead!' he muttered to himself in a hoarse undertone. He is dead, dead; and Maimie is a ——'

Jocelyn checked him sternly with a rebuking gesture.

'He is dead,' the painter said in a calmer voice, 'and Maimie is . . . a widow. Never for a moment say the other even to your own heart, Adrian.'

And when they went back to Maimie that evening, they said not a word about the fire or the mutilation. They told her merely, breaking it to her gently, that Sydney was dead—dead at the hospital.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE ORDEAL.

THERE was an inquest, of course: it would have been clearly impossible to do without an inquest; but, after all, it was a purely formal one. The fire had almost obliterated from men's minds the memory of the suicide, and the question how the mere dead body came to be burnt and mutilated by the flames superseded almost entirely the real and original question how Sydney Chevenix ever came by his suspicious and mysterious death in the first place. The horror of the charred and disfigured corpse absorbed attention from the wound and the letter, which seemed, for the rest, sufficiently obvious.

Maimie herself appeared as a matter of form to give her evidence; but she was merely led in crying by Hetty and Jocelyn; and coroner and jury, naturally touched by so much beauty and so much sorrow in so young and childish a widow, were well content to let her go, after telling them in a few simple broken words how she had come to the laboratory on the evening of the suicide, and found the place all deluged with blood, and the letter (produced) lying upon the table. So Hetty led her out again, and took her home, without her ever hearing a word, for good or for evil, about the fire and the horrible disfigurement.

Then Jocelyn and Hardy were put upon their oath, and described how they had found Sydney, on the evening of the accident, very depressed and dull and preoccupied, playing with a pistol, which he attempted to conceal from them; and Hardy added, with the perennial joy of the man who can rightly say, 'I told you so,' that he had suggested to Jocelyn

Cipriani at the time the danger of suicide, and that Jocelyn in his superior wisdom had pooh-poohed the notion as utterly ridiculous.

'But, for my part, I could plainly see by his eyes,' the younger painter said emphatically, 'that he was just going to make an attempt to destroy himself.'

Hannah Gowland also gave evidence; but her evidence, too, amounted to nothing. She had heard her master open the door and go into the street, and that was all; when the bell rang, she rushed into the laboratory, and found her mistress, who had just let herself in with the latch-key, fainting away at the sight before her.

Had she heard no report of a pistol when Mr. Chevenix shot himself?

Well, in that house, they never took much account of reports or anything. Mr. Chevenix was always blowing up somebody or something out in the laboratory, and they never noticed it much; nor no more did the neighbours. She might have heard it, or, again, she mightn't have heard it; but, anyhow, she didn't remember anything about it.

Jocelyn Cipriani observed with his acute sense, as he watched the witnesses keenly, that Hannah Gowland seemed somehow to stand strangely on the defensive—to answer all questions cautiously and suspiciously, as though she expected an attempt to draw something unpleasant out of her by insidious stages. But it was natural, perhaps—perfectly natural. She may have thought she was herself suspected; she may even—who knows?—for Jocelyn was a student of human nature—have had some visitor of her own in the kitchen at the time, whose presence she was naturally anxious to conceal from the jury and her mistress. How much we usually look at everybody else from the point of view of our own interests and our own relations with them; how much we forget that such a girl as this Hannah Gowland, for example, has her own individuality and her own objects, her own hopes and her own terrors; how seldom we remember that she too sees things from her own particular points of view exclusively. So musing, Jocelyn Cipriani dismissed from his mind this queer suspiciousness of Hannah Gowland's defensive manner; and as for the rest, they were neither painters nor observers

of human nature, and they overlooked the signs of it altogether.

The only other important evidence as to the cause of death was the house-surgeon's at the Regent's Park Hospital. That evidence Jocelyn watched with close attention, and so also did Adrian Pym.

Surely the doctor's practised eye would detect the fact that the wound was not a self-inflicted one? Yet, after all, why should it? Many wounds must be much the same whether the pistol be held by the hand of the wounded man or that of an adversary. As for the surgeon himself, he had very little doubt at all about the matter. He had at first supposed, indeed, he said, that the wound had been inflicted by another hand, because he thought the ball had passed in at the back below the shoulder-blade, and out in front by the right lung. But now that he had been able to perform a careful and accurate post-mortem, he saw distinctly, as did his brother-operator, that the appearances which had at first led him to adopt that hasty opinion were wholly deceptive, and that the bullet had really been discharged from a pistol held close to the body—right in front of it—as would naturally be the case on the hypothesis of a suicide. Death was due entirely to the pistol-wound. The injuries by the fire were clearly subsequent. Life had been extinct for fully half an hour before the beginning of the burning. The jaw had had time to set in completely. Of the causes of the fire the surgeon knew nothing.

Two more witnesses were called, *pro formâ;* but their evidence really related entirely to the accident in the ward, and not at all to the underlying question of the fatal pistol-shot. They were the nurses at the hospital. One of them had seen the deceased, Sydney Chevenix, No. 17, die at a quarter to three in the morning. She had tied up his jaw, as usual, with a handkerchief, and left him there till the dressers were ready. She was positive he was dead before the fire broke out: why, yes, of course she was. She had seen hundreds of them die in her time, and would she have gone and tied up his face if she thought it possible he was still living? At four o'clock she handed over the charge to Amelia Hesselwether. And so she, for her part, was well out of it.

Amelia Hesselwether had nothing serious to add, so far as regarded the cause of death, to what had been already stated by the last witness. She had seen the deceased, Sydney Chevenix, lying dead in No. 17, when she took over the room from her predecessor. He was stone-dead: of that she was certain. As for the fire, which had nothing to do with the cause of death, it originated in the restlessness of another patient, in No. 18, delirious with fever. No. 18 had upset the paraffin lamp by his bedside, and the whole place was in flames in a second. By great efforts they had successfully removed all the patients without an accident. That was all she knew about it.

Jocelyn Cipriani, watching her narrowly, observed that this witness too gave her evidence with great reluctance, and in some obvious trepidation. Clearly she had certain good reasons of her own for wishing to hush up the business as far as possible. With his instinctive habit of throwing himself into other people's attitudes, however, Jocelyn at once invented a plausible cause for it. The woman had been dozing when the accident arose: it was evident she had no clear idea of her own how it all came about; and she was trembling in her shoes for her own skin, and for fear she should lose her situation.

That concluded the whole evidence.

As the jury whispered together over their verdict, four faces in the body of the room betrayed in four curiously varied ways their different degrees and kinds of anxiety. Jocelyn Cipriani's was pale and eager: Adrian Pym's was sullen and terrified: Hannah Gowland's was burning with a deep red spot of violent intensity: Amelia Hesselwether's was heavy with the sordid stolid fear of a dull, stupid, self-centred servant-girl.

The jury found, after a minute's consideration, that the deceased, Sydney Chevenix, committed suicide while in an unsound state of mind, and added a rider condemning the use of paraffin lamps by the patients' bedsides in the Regent's Park Hospital.

'Thank God,' Adrian Pym muttered soft and low to Jocelyn Cipriani. 'The verdict puts her out of all danger, I hope, for ever.'

'It does,' Jocelyn answered with a sigh of relieved suspense. 'The fire was the very luckiest thing that could possibly have happened for us. It took off those twelve foolish persons' distracted attention from the one fundamental question of life and death they were really and truly asked to decide upon.'

As they went out of the room, Hannah Gowland stood half-fainting by the door, and leaning on Lucy.

'Thank God,' she was muttering low to herself. 'They've never got us into any trouble! I was afraid they'd get us into trouble, Lucy.'

Amelia Hesselwether stood with the other nurse hard by.

'Well, that's a blessing, anyhow,' she said in her coarse, stolid voice. 'They've as good as put the blame of the fire on the committee of the hospital, by saying they ought never to have used them paraffin lamps there. I was afraid of my life they'd be giving me the sack for having let that crazy foreigner man get at it to upset it. He was that delirious, the crazy man was, there was no doing anything anyhow to hold him.'

'Well,' the other nurse said in an unconcerned voice, 'anyhow, he'll be glad to hear it's suicide while in an unsound state of mind, that man Benyowski will. He's been in such a rampaging excitement ever since the fire, there's been no quieting him; and he promised me a sovereign as soon as he's discharged, if only I'd bring him back word what the verdict was as soon as they'd given it. He's been as mad to know what it's all coming to as if he thought they was going to hang him for upsetting the paraffin. I do believe the man ain't right in his head sometimes; and that's just my opinion about it.'

Benyowski! Benyowski! so that was the name of the patient who upset the lamp, was it? Where on earth had Jocelyn heard the name before? It was quite familiar to him. And then, with a sudden revival of memory, it flashed across his mind that Benyowski was the name of the grim Polish assistant who used to work in Sydney Chevenix's laboratory. What on earth could this man Benyowski have to do at the hospital, and why should he be so interested in the result of the inquest?

Three days later, Jocelyn Cipriani and Adrian Pym went down with many other mourners to Sydney Chevenix's funeral, at Woking Cemetery. And when they saw the loose clay shovelled in upon that oaken coffin in the shallow grave, they both felt in their own minds that the earth had closed for ever and ever upon Maimie's secret.

Murder will out, says the old-fashioned proverb—a proverb of days more believing than our own. But murder will not always out, thought Jocelyn Cipriani; as a matter of fact, how many times a year is the proverb falsified? Who ever discovered the Great Coram Street murderer? or the Braithwaite murderer? or, to take a more certain historical instance, past all gainsaying, the murderer of the Quaker girl immortalized by Macaulay? No, no; the vulgar axiom will not hold water. For who on earth would ever dream of suspecting poor little innocent-faced beautiful Maimie?

Besides, save Maimie's own self, who ever knew, if it came to that, whether a murder had or had not been committed?

On what a slight thread, to be sure, does the crime itself really hang! We call it a murder, because Sydney was dead. It would have been no more than a mere accident if Sydney had happened to pull safely through it.

But Sydney was dead. So there was an end of it.

Sydney was dead, and now all we had got to think about was how to make Maimie happy.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE OTHER SIDE.

Every event has many aspects—one for each mind that is an actor or spectator of it. This was how the events of that terrible episode envisaged themselves to Maimie, to Jocelyn, and to Adrian. Meanwhile, they had envisaged themselves very differently to Sydney Chevenix in the accident ward at Regent's Park Hospital.

When Jocelyn had left him on his first visit, Sydney dozed awhile in complete unconsciousness of all that was passing

around him, till at length, after what seemed to him a considerable interval, he heard the clock from the neighbouring church-tower strike eleven. Then he awoke to a faint consciousness of the fact that the bed next his own, No. 18, was being allotted to a fresh patient.

'Very curious indeed,' the surgeon was saying, 'this second case, so precisely similar to the other one, coming in on the same evening! There must be some jolly row going on in the neighbourhood, one would think. This man's shot, too, right through the body. Is his name and address known, I wonder?'

The man they were laying in the next bed seemed to be moving his lips for a moment feebly and ineffectually. Then Sydney Chevenix's heart gave a sudden throb of surprise and wonder, as the muttered words struck his ear distinctly, 'Stanislas Benyowski.'

Yes, it was Benyowski himself, not a doubt about it. Some strange chance had associated the two discoverers there that night in that terrible conjunction. Sydney Chevenix breathed heavily. It seemed like an interposition of fate that had brought Benyowski so close beside him under such singular and mysterious circumstances.

'Stanislas Benyowski,' the surgeon repeated, writing down his name carelessly upon a blank card, and slipping it into the little metal receptacle. 'Ah, well then, that accounts for it all. A Pole, I suppose; one of these refugee dynamite people. They're always falling out like thieves among themselves, and I expect there's been some free shooting going on among the gang this evening.'

As he spoke, Benyowski, lying stretched at full length upon the bed where they had laid him, turned his pale face slowly to the right, and glanced at Sydney Chevenix with a sudden look of surprise and recognition, which Sydney's features immediately reciprocated. Neither man was strong enough to utter a single word, but their eyes met, and they knew one another; it was impossible to mistake the little start of astonishment with which each met the startled gaze of his wounded neighbour.

'Dynamiters, both of 'em, I don't doubt,' the surgeon went on, proceeding coolly to examine the wound. 'Must

have been having a general pistol-match all round, somewhere down in Marylebone; that's where most of these people usually congregate. By Jove! this last fellow's done for, anyhow. He can't possibly hold out till morning. In fact, it's really no good trying to do anything for him; only bothering the poor wretch for nothing. He's hopelessly wounded—quite hopelessly. However, of course, one must bandage him decently. Absurd etiquette of the profession, to be sure, that can't even allow a case like this to die unworried in his bed, in peace and quietness!'

'The other case seems to be doing pretty well,' whispered the nurse, in the regulation undertone of a hospital ward. 'No. 17, I mean; the first this evening. His pulse is very nice now, and his skin's as cool as one could expect under the circumstances.'

'Oh yes,' the surgeon went on carelessly, glancing at Sydney with a sidelong eye. 'He'll do, I dare say, if nothing unexpected turns up to prevent him. No vital organ badly struck there. This is a much more serious bullet wound, No. 18's, I take it. Lungs grazed, and spine a bit injured.'

Sydney Chevenix drew a long breath. O God! O agony! He felt it was true—quite true; he wasn't dying, he was going to recover. The injury was a serious one, but not fatal. His professional instinct told him that at once quite clearly. Yes, yes; with his splendid constitution—that constitution he was generally so proud of, and that now he hated and detested so cordially—he was sure to get over it; he could feel in his own heart he was going to get over it. He would soon pull round again: his pulse was beating steady and even; there was no fever, no unnatural exaltation, no failing, or feebleness, or relapse of any sort. In spite of all his internal agony, he was bearing up against the effects of the wound as well as could possibly be expected.

Nay, rather, the internal agony itself was keeping him up. He couldn't die, because he was alternately so eager for it, and so anxious lest Maimie should be suspected of having murdered him.

He lay there still, pale and silent, unable as yet to utter a word; unable to confer with his brother-surgeon; yet hear-

ing and seeing everything that was passing all around him, and terribly agitated in soul within with that one wild thought of danger to Maimie. There was no road out of it possible either way. If he died, they might hang Maimie; and if he lived, Maimie could never again be happy. Ah, God! if he could only die in peace, and feel quite sure that Maimie would never, never be suspected, but would marry the man she loved better than him, and be happier then than he could ever hope to make her!

Maimie! Maimie! Maimie! Maimie! Never a single thought of himself or of his suffering; never even a thought of anger or horror; never a doubt or a loathing for the crime she had committed; scarcely so much as a pang for the very fact that she did not love him—she *did* love him, as much as he deserved and as she was able; but one absorbing overwhelming fear for Maimie's safety—one devouring, entrancing, self-effacing desire for Maimie's happiness! What in the name of Heaven did it matter to him whom she married, or what she did, as long as Maimie—his own Maimie, his darling Maimie, his heart's idol—was pleased and happy? Maimie willed it, and that was enough. Who was he that he should venture to complain of it? If Maimie wished him to die that minute, Sydney Chevenix felt almost guilty in his own soul because he wasn't able, try as he would, to die soon enough.

The night wore on, hour after hour, slowly, slowly. The deep-toned clock in the big church-tower hard by struck twelve: it struck one: it struck two; and still Sydney Chevenix lay there on his bed in the hospital ward, vaguely conscious of all around him, and revolving for ever in his own fevered and whirling brain that terrible problem of what to do for the best for Maimie. As hour upon hour passed slowly away, clanging its quarters one after the other—an eternity of doubt and suffering for Sydney Chevenix—the consciousness that he would recover and not die, forced itself more and more certainly upon him with every minute. Yes, yes—it was terrible; it was awful; it was unspeakable; it was unendurable; but he could not die—he could not—he could not. Did ever man so cling to life as he clung in his frenzy, then, to the bare chance of dying? What would he

not have given that horrible night if he could but change places with Stanislas Benyowski?

If he could but change places with Stanislas Benyowski! Benyowski lay there, so still and motionless, growing fainter and paler in the face every minute. *He* was dying, Stanislas Benyowski was—not a doubt of it. Fortunate man! he was dying—dying! Dying slowly before Sydney Chevenix's very eyes! And how coolly they take death, too, in a hospital! The night nurse, seated by herself in her chair at the end of the ward, dozed off quietly from time to time, and now and again walked once with formal care from end to end of the long corridor, very noiselessly, casting a casual glance as she passed at the most critical cases. She saw that Stanislas Benyowski was dying, and she looked at him like an expert, with an observant eye, as Sydney Chevenix himself had often looked at interesting patients in the Middlesex Hospital.

Half-past two clanged from the clock-tower. Benyowski turned his head uneasily. Sydney Chevenix, looking across askance without moving in his bed, to No. 18, saw Benyowski's mouth open with an ominous gasp, and remain open for the space of a moment. There was a deep breath, a gurgle of the throat, a slow relaxation of the facial muscles; and then the lower jaw dropped upon the neck in a loose fashion that Sydney knew well at once how to interpret. The nurse heard the rattle in his throat from the end of the ward. She came up and carelessly watched him dying. Then she closed the staring eyes with her rough finger and thumb—no love, no reverence, a mere function of her daily duty—tied a handkerchief lightly around the beardless face and went back yawning to her place by the fireside, leaving the fresh corpse to take care of itself as best it might till to-morrow morning.

It was a ghastly thing even for Sydney Chevenix, accustomed as he was to sights and sounds of death, thus to lie helpless, speechless, and motionless, side by side with that pale dead man, whom he had seen living and well in the full enjoyment of perfect health that very afternoon, and the cause of whose death was still to him a profound mystery. He turned his head as far on one side as his open wound

and the cramping bandages would easily allow him. He could see Benyowski, lying there still, growing colder and whiter as each minute passed, with the coarse hospital handkerchief tied horribly around his lantern jaw. He could see his eyelids like a marble statue, dropped motionless upon those piercing eager eyes. He could see his face, no longer grim and stern, so calm and placid in the relaxation of death.

Oh, what would he not give if he could change places now with Stanislas Benyowski!

Still the night wore on. Three! Half-past three! A quarter to four! He couldn't sleep for looking at Stanislas and thinking of Maimie. A clean-shaven man like himself, Stanislas! Oh, if it had only been the other way! If Stanislas could have lived and he could have died! Then Maimie might have been been free to make herself happy.

Who was he that he should dare to stand in the way of Maimie's happiness?

Well, well, he could live long enough to vindicate her, and then—the Thames after all was very handy. She should have her way, and marry Adrian.

If only he could change places with Stanislas Benyowski!

His head was running and reeling now in the wild vortex of a feverish delirium. A great change had come over him during the last half-hour. He felt the strain of that silent agony was growing too much for him. His brain whirled round and round like a giddy dancer's to two swiftly alternating refrains—'Maimie, Maimie, Maimie, Maimie!' 'If only I could change places with Stanislas Benyowski!'

Slowly out of this dizzy chaos of fevered thought a terrible, indefinite, incoherent plan seemed to rise up and spontaneously frame itself. Sydney Chevenix hardly knew how or why the idea occurred to him; but it did occur: a wild idea, a mad idea, a feverish idea, but one that just then for that passing moment took full possession of his entire nature with absorbing vehemence—the strange idea of actually and physically changing places with Stanislas Benyowski.

What was he, and what was Benyowski to the nurse and the surgeon? A case, a number, a bed in the accident ward—that was all; not a person or a reality. How could they ever really discriminate one from the other? Impossible,

impossible. He knew what hospital practice was himself, and he felt certain that No. 17 and No. 18 were cyphers, cyphers, less than nothing to nurse and doctor in their official capacity.

Besides, the second nurse would soon come on—at four o'clock. If only he could take advantage of the change, they would never know one man from the other.

But then the inquest! the identification! the necessary formalities! Maimie or Jocelyn would be called upon to identify him—the corpse, that is to say—Benyowski's body. How on earth would he ever get over that insuperable difficulty?

If he had been sane and cool and collected as usual, the hitch he thus immediately perceived would have sufficed at once to quash for ever the very idea of his foolhardy undertaking. But lying there as he lay, feverish and delirious, with the concentrated agony of that evening's terrors goading and urging him on irrationally, he cared nothing for ulterior consequences; he left them all to the chapter of accidents. One insane desire alone possessed him now—to change places with Stanislas Benyowski.

Presently, the second nurse came to the door, and whispered a few inaudible words in the ear of the first one. Then they walked together down the ward. Sydney, with his senses now preternaturally sharpened and exalted by his increasing delirium, could hear, as they approached, every syllable they said to one another from the far end of the long corridor.

'How are they getting along?' asked the new nurse.

'Oh, pretty well,' her companion replied in an offhand voice. 'There's another of 'em dead since the doctor left. Down at the opposite end of the ward. New case, pistol wound; No. 17 or 18 or something. There's a second new one, exactly the same, right alongside of him. Pistol case, too. Been some shooting going on down Marylebone way. Foreigners, both of 'em; got German names or Russian or something.'

Sydney strained his ears with hushed attention. Thank God for that fortunate indefinite vagueness. If only he could gain a little time, all might yet be well for Maimie.

He didn't exactly know what he wanted or why he wanted it, but in his own mind he somehow felt that if only he could change places with Stanislas Benyowski, Maimie might still be saved and might marry Adrian. Maimie, Maimie, Maimie, Maimie!—if only he could change places with Stanislas Benyowski!

They would think he was dead. They would hold an inquest upon him. They would put his suicide in all the papers. If Maimie, Maimie, were even suspected, he could come forward and prove that she had not murdered him. If Maimie, on the other hand, were not suspected—if the suicide story went down with the jury—he would cease entirely to be Sydney Chevenix, and would become henceforth Stanislas Benyowski. Yes, yes; Maimie should have everything on earth that was his, and he would watch over her and care for her unseen, and see that she was happy with the husband she had chosen.

A terrible plan—a mad plan—a feverish plan; but still the one that then and there implicitly commended itself to Sydney Chevenix's delirious intellect. Impracticable, utterly, in the end, no doubt, but plausible enough at first hearing. Only one great fundamental flaw in it: how on earth was he ever to get over the difficult problem of identification?

Well, leave that to the chapter of accidents. The first great point was now at stake, to change places with Stanislas Benyowski. When that was once fairly accomplished, he could think afterwards about the subsequent question of identity and recognition. Perhaps Jocelyn Cipriani would help him out! Who knows! Jocelyn was a philosopher, and like other philosophers not over scrupulous; and Jocelyn was very, very fond of darling Maimie. For wherever Maimie's happiness was concerned, Sydney Chevenix unreservedly confessed to himself that right and wrong didn't enter at all into his personal calculation of possible consequences. In Maimie's case he was frankly extra-ethical.

And all this time, Stanislas Benyowski's fresh white corpse lay ghastly and lonely on its bed beside him; and from minute to minute Sydney cast his dazed eyes across at it with a hideous, hungry, unnatural yearning.

A fortunate thing, indeed, that Stanislas, too, was a close-

shaven man, the same as he himself was. What nurse or doctor would ever discriminate one close-shaven patient of thirty-five from another beside him, lying in bed, the one dead, the other living?

Anyhow, if only chance should favour him, the attempt, at least, was well worth making.

At a quarter-past four, the second nurse, now alone on the watch, left the ward untended for a few minutes. Sydney's heart beat fast and quick. Providence itself was clearly helping forward his terrible endeavour. Now for it! Now for it! Not a second to be lost! With a wild and fierce effort, bandaged and tightly strapped as he was, he lifted himself like a madman from his bed, and stepped out half-naked, in his tight swathing-clothes, on to the cold floor of the noiseless hospital. Then his brain began to reel frantically with the awful exertion, and he nearly swooned, as he stood in the space between the beds, with excitement and exhaustion.

With a terrible strain he pulled himself together and didn't fall. Come what might, he must carry his plan through now. There was no possibility of turning back. To do so would be fatal to Maimie's happiness. Maimie, Maimie, Maimie, Maimie! He must change places with Stanislas Benyowski!

He staggered across, scarce knowing what he did, to Benyowski's bedside. The corpse lay there, still and placid, mocking with its unruffled face the whirlwind of fever and passion that was fast wearing away Sydney's Chevenix's own reason. He bent over it, and caught it in his arms. Hush! hush! was that the nurse coming back again? Were any of the other patients looking? No, no. All asleep, asleep or unconscious. All, all, except the man with the broken arm at the end of the ward, who was lying on his side, turned the other way, muttering and groaning feebly to himself in pain and loneliness! With one mad swoop he caught up the corpse like a log from the bed, and, nerved by the momentary strength of fever, raised it bodily up in his own strong arms. Thank God for his strength, if it saved Maimie!

He lifted his ghastly burden easily across the little space

between the two beds, and then stood, holding it irresolute in his grasp for a moment, above No. 17—his own till that minute. Then he glanced rapidly round. The nurse wasn't yet returning. All was well. He would still save Maimie. He laid the corpse down in haste upon the bed, and arranged the coverlet neatly across it. The handkerchief had slipped from the jaw with the movement: Sydney Chevenix replaced it carefully, and gazed at the pale, cold face below him with horrible complacency. What did he care now for that mysterious corpse, or anyone, or anything, as long as he could make Maimie happy?

A little paraffin lamp, such as they commonly use in hospitals, hung loose in a rack above No. 18 bed. Sydney took it down in his fierce joy from its place, and, still upheld by the strength of his delirium, calmly inspected the corpse he had laid out, and pulled the edges of the coverlet straight about the neck and shoulders. Then he glanced with intense approval at the printed card by the head of the bed. 'No. 17,' he read aloud: 'Mr. Sydney Chevenix, 27, Beaumont Terrace, Regent's Park, N.W.' As he read, he chuckled to himself a fearful chuckle: the fever was beginning now, in its course, to overcome him utterly.

At last he laid down the paraffin lamp on the little deal table that stood by the bedside. Once more he glared hurriedly around. No, no; nobody had seen or noticed the horrid episode. In another minute the nurse would be back, and the change would have been effected—for ever and ever. Sydney Chevenix would be lying dead—legally dead—in No. 17; and Stanislas Benyowski would be alive again in the bed beside him. He hugged himself with delight at the notion. It held him so that he could hardly find strength after his terrific effort to get back safely into his own bed—Benyowski's bed—for he would be Sydney Chevenix now no longer.

A noise in the corridor! A rustling! A footstep! The nurse was coming! Recalled to himself by the instant danger, Sydney Chevenix sprang with a bound towards No. 18. As he did so, he hit his arm sharply against something—he knew not what; but it stung him severely. There was a rattling sound as of an object falling—no matter why

—and a smart pain in his jarred elbow. But he took no heed now of either; he only sprang back the quicker to the bed, and falling on it, with all his force spent and exhausted, he swooned away in a dead faint from the manifold excitements of that awful evening.

CHAPTER XXXI.

SUSPENSE.

When he came to again, some ten minutes later, as it seemed to him, he was conscious first of a strange din and noise and bustle on every side of him, voices shouting and praying and cursing and screaming, and a loud commanding tone above all the turmoil, giving hasty orders which he did not for a time fully understand, but which he felt to be delivered with appalling sternness. Then he was aware of a choking sensation, as of smoke and gas suffocating him as he lay there helpless and immovable. Next, a fearful glare struck upon his eyeballs even through the eyelids, as though the whole room, wherever it might be—for he had forgotten for the moment everything that had passed—were one great surging sea of liquid fire.

'Take that one first—No. 18,' the loud voice commanded, with an air of authority; and even as it spoke Sydney felt himself lifted bodily out of the burning bed-clothes, for they were all on fire, and rapidly rolled round in a big enveloping rug-like blanket, and carried hastily in a porter's arms into another ward of the hospital. As he passed, he opened his eyes vaguely, and looked behind him. Huge sheets of flame were leaping wildly about the corridor on every side, and a white corpse—Stanislas Benyowski's corpse . . .

Ah, yes; he remembered it all distinctly now. He remembered the accident—the wound—the substitution! But what had happened? What had happened? And then, in a flash, a clue occurred to him. The lamp! The lamp! The hospital was on fire. He must have knocked it over. That was all he knew. And he—why, he was henceforth Stanislas Benyowski.

The flames were leaping and dancing in savage glee about the silent corpse. O God! O God! they would burn it

to ashes, or, at least, disfigure it past all recognition. Great Heavens! what a chance! What an interposition of Providence! Pure accident had helped him fairly out of that supreme difficulty, which no amount of clever contrivance or deliberate arrangement could ever possibly have enabled him to surmount! It was wonderful! wonderful! but oh, how terrible! For there were many more patients still struggling and crying plaintively in the wards, and the fire, perhaps, would stifle all of them. And then it would be *he*, *he* who was the murderer!

Breathless with horror, suspense, and feverishness, Sydney Chevenix could still hear but a single tune ringing for ever in his deafened ears, 'Maimie, Maimie, Maimie, Maimie!' Come what might of it, he had saved Maimie!

They carried him down into another ward, in another wing, and laid him hastily on a bed prepared for him. A hospital surgeon was there in attendance, and a nurse with a pencil asked mechanically his name and number.

In a choking voice, Sydney Chevenix answered feebly, 'Stanislas Benyowski, No. 18. From the accident ward.' And then, at last, he collapsed utterly.

When he next became conscious, it was broad daylight, and the fire, so far as he could judge, must have been quite extinguished, for he heard no more running up and down upon the stairs, and he saw around him, in the neighbouring beds, many of the faces he had observed the night before in the room in which they had first laid him.

'The fire! the fire!' he cried to the passive nurse at the bedside close to him. 'Is it out?—is it out? Is anybody injured?'

The woman turned and glanced at him carelessly.

'Oh, it's you,' she said; 'the Russian—is it? Yes, yes; the fire's out long ago, safe enough: only smouldering a bit in the burnt timbers. Don't you be afraid for yourself any longer. The fire's out, and it's all right again.'

'But the others!—the others!' Sydney went on eagerly. 'Are they hurt? Are they killed? Is there anybody dead with it?'

'Don't you go exciting yourself on no account,' the woman answered, with stolid indifference. 'Doctor's orders is, that

you're to be kept as quiet and cool as possible, and not be allowed to talk to anybody. You've got to lie still, and not excite yourself.'

'But I shall be all the more excited unless I know,' Sydney exclaimed in impotent anxiety. 'I shall worry and fret about it all day long, unless you tell me. Was anybody killed? Was anybody killed by it?'

'Drat the man!' the nurse replied with some considerable asperity. 'Law, now, what on earth does he want to know whether they were killed or not for? You're safe enough yourself, aren't you, eh? and that had ought to be quite sufficient for you. You only came in here just last night, and you've given us more trouble and bother already than all the other patients we've ever had in the whole place put together. It was you as upset the lamp yourself, and set fire to the Accidents; and now you want to know, as mild as milk, whether any of 'em in the Accidents is injured by it? No; there's none of 'em injured: not a soul of 'em injured. We got 'em all away at a minute's notice, so you needn't fret about it. It's all organization—that's what I call it. Lucky it didn't spread to the Fever and the Infectious. I suppose you thought you'd set fire to the whole wardful of 'em! You'd ought to be a dynamiter by trade, you had, to judge by the look of you!'

'And Benyowski?' Sydney asked, with fevered lips, forgetting himself for the moment in his eager anxiety. 'Benyowski? Benyowski? The man in No. 17, you know, beside me? Is he burnt? Is he hurt? Is he dead?—tell me.'

The woman looked at him with a wondering smile, and a touch of ridicule.

'Benyowski!' she cried. 'Says you, Benyowski. You must be wandering in your head yourself a bit, sure; delirious, or something. Why, you're Benyowski, you are—ain't you? and you've got to keep quiet, and not excite yourself, by doctor's orders. So now lie round and take it easy, Benyowski; I ain't going to answer you no more questions.'

'But the other man,' Sydney cried in petulant despair; 'the man who lay in the bed next to mine—the fellow that one of you came over to, and tied up his chin with a hand-

kerchief, you know. Chevenix, Chevenix—is he burnt, eh? What's come to him?'

'Oh, him!' the nurse answered with a smile—a compassionate smile. 'Him—Chevenix—the one in No. 17, you mean! Oh, he was dead long before the fire began, bless you! You set fire to his bedding finely, I'll warrant you; but he ain't burnt up quite, though he's scorched terrible. Now, just you look here, you've got to mind me; don't you go and ask no more questions.'

Sydney lay for a while in silent agony, wondering in his own heart whether he might venture upon the one final inquiry that still troubled his unquiet soul; then he muttered at last, in a quiver of excitement:

'Is he much disfigured? Do you think he'll be known? Can they recognize him? Can they recognize him? Do you think they'll know him again?'

'Why, what the devil ails the man!' the nurse replied testily. 'Why, in the name o' goodness, are you so particular anxious, I should like to know, about this 'ere patient—Chevenix? You didn't each of you shoot one another, did you? Patients is patients—and there's lots to spare of 'em. Well, his face isn't pretty to look at now, certainly; his own mother wouldn't know him from Adam, he's scorched and burnt so. You've spoilt his beauty for him. But he was dead all right before the fire broke out; and if there's anybody blamed, it'll be you that's blamed for it, so that's a comfort. Now, not another word for anything, I tell you. Discipline's discipline. You're not the only patient in the hospital, remember.'

For three long endless days and nights, Sydney lay there in one continuous terror, writhing on his bed, not with physical pain—for his wound was progressing favourably, the surgeon said—but with devouring suspense for the ultimate success of his perilous impersonation. Who would be sent to identify the body? he wondered. How far was it disfigured and how far recognisable? Would Maimie be called to see it, and know at once it was not her husband's? If so, would she lose her presence of mind, and say at that supreme moment, outright, that it wasn't Sydney; or would she wait and watch and unravel the mystery on her own account,

without disclosing anything of her doubts to anybody? Hour after hour, day after day, and night after night, Sydney lay there tossing and turning feverishly, and torturing himself by asking over and over again those endless, hopeless, unanswerable questions.

Benyowski was about the same height and build as himself—that much, at any rate, was in his favour; but he was a somewhat thinner and wirier man, and that, on the other hand, was in so much against him. Both were beardless, but Benyowski's eyebrows were bushier than his own: pray God the fire might have burned off the eyebrows! If only he could have asked anybody else about it—if only he could have trusted Jocelyn Cipriani, for example! but no, the secret must be confided to no other living soul save himself: *quod tacitum velis, nemini dixeris.* And yet, how wearing was this long suspense! If he could but know whether they suspected anything! whether Jocelyn or the servants had seen the body! whether everybody thought the corpse was his and not Benyowski's! Thank Heaven, nobody would ever come and inquire for Benyowski: that was one blessing. His Nihilist friends, who no doubt had murdered him, would never take the trouble to step round and ask whether he was dead or living, and give themselves up by so doing into the hands of justice.

Of justice! justice! justice! Sydney Chevenix had been always hitherto accounted a just and upright and honest man: what terrible abyss of crime and falsehood was this into which Maimie's act was hurrying him headlong? Benyowski had been murdered, foully murdered; there could be very little doubt of any sort about that: and he, Sydney Chevenix, by this false substitution of Benyowski's dead body for his own living one, would be screening the murderers—Benyowski's murderers and his own also! He would be making himself an accessory after the fact. How rapidly do we sink when once we begin to play tricks with the truth, and to palter with our consciences! and yet what other could he possibly do! Maimie, Maimie, he must save Maimie! Was it to be endured by human flesh and blood that a man should let his own wife—and that wife Maimie!—be branded for a murderess! Hating and loathing him-

self in his own soul for his wicked act of deception against the claims of justice, Sydney Chevenix could nevertheless think but one eternal thought: 'I must save Maimie; I must save Maimie! Maimie, Maimie, Maimie, Maimie! Whatever comes of it, I must save Maimie!'

Your taciturn, self-contained, solitary Benyowskis have few friends—that was one comfort. Nobody would ever care to hunt him up. His Nihilist comrades must have turned against him, and his death would count for nothing with anybody.

And then, slowly, as he lay on his bed, it began to dawn upon Sydney Chevenix's fevered soul that the way things had now actually turned out was the very best way in the end for Maimie—for Maimie.

If he had died, who could tell what unspeakable things might finally have happened to her? What formless suspicion might gradually have grown up; what chance might have brought about a casual discovery; what accident might have revealed that the wound he had received could not really have been self-inflicted? If he had died, Maimie, his own Maimie, dear, beautiful, innocent, darling little Maimie, might have been—oh, it was too terrible even to think of it! Yes, yes, if he had really died, all might have come out, and then there would have been no hope of escape or of happiness for Maimie.

But now, as things had actually turned out, all the advantages of his being alive and of his being dead were combined together with glorious incongruity. If ever Maimie were suspected or accused, there he would be, alive and producible to refute the calumny, and to say boldly, 'This is no murder.'

If the worst came to the worst, and those meddling police officers chose to proceed against his darling, his precious one, for assault with attempt to commit murder, he could lie and forswear himself—for Maimie's sake—and declare it was all the merest accident. So it was! So it was—the merest accident! Dear, tender-hearted, innocent little Maimie! she would never willingly have hurt an insect. She would never do harm to anybody or anything.

On the other hand, if nobody ever suspected the truth—

if his supposed death was put down universally as an inexplicable suicide—he would live on, always in readiness to come forward and vindicate her, and would watch for ever over Maimie's happiness. Maimie herself, indeed, need never know that he was still living; that would spoil all; that would prevent her, of course, from marrying Adrian. . . . For she must marry Adrian. . . . She would never be happy unless she married Adrian. . . . They call it bigamy, those fools of lawyers; but Maimie would never know she was committing bigamy. . . . It was with him, Sydney, that all the blame would really lie; he was the criminal, and for Maimie's sake he would bear it—he would bear it.

Yes, Maimie would be happy, and he could watch over her and ensure her happiness. He would be legally dead, and she would inherit everything. Adrian, whom she loved, would make her happier than ever he had been able to make her.

So for those three endless days and nights, Sydney Chevenix tossed and turned and thought over to himself the doubtful chances, in suspense and agony; and all the time, as he knew full well, his wound was healing, healing rapidly in spite of him.

The only thing that kept No. 17 back, said the hospital surgeon, was the state of feverish anxiety into which he had thrown himself. But for that, with his splendid constitution, there could have been no doubt at all about the fellow's recovery. These Nihilists and dynamiters always do recover.

On the fourth day, the two nurses went out to the inquest on the body described as Sydney Chevenix's. When they came back they found 'the man Benyowski' almost dead with eagerness and anxiety to hear the verdict of the coroner's jury.

'Well,' the nurse said, in answer to his hasty reiterated questions, 'the jury don't lay no blame on you, or no blame on nobody, for the accident with the paraffin; they only recommend that there should be no more of them there lamps used in the hospital at all in future. So you see you're safe out of it all any way. Whatever blame there is, is thrown on the committee. And the committee and the nurses is always at variance.'

'But the body, the body—the dead man—Chevenix: what did they say of him?' Sydney gasped out excitedly.

'Him! oh, him,' the woman answered in her coolest manner; 'just the regular thing! They brought it in suicide while in an unsound state of mind, the same as always. Another of your foreigners, a man with a pointed brown beard and some crackjaw outlandish name or other——'

'Cipriani,' Sydney suggested tentatively.

'Ah, Chippery-Annie, that was just him,' the nurse answered with a careless nod of the head. 'He went in and identified the body—not that there was much left for him to identify; and the widow—a pretty little thing, no more nor a girl, as the saying is—she came in crying fit to break her heart, and taking on no end about him.'

Sydney's heart gave a sudden bound against his wasted bosom. Then Maimie was sorry—sorry to have lost him! Thank God for that—that Maimie still loved him!

'And they read a letter out from the man himself, saying that he was going to commit suicide. And Amelia, she gave evidence about the lamp upsetting, and didn't attach no blame to nobody. And the jury they returned a verdict that he killed himself in a temporary insanity. So we're well out of it. And they say the body's to be buried at Woking on Friday.'

Sydney Chevenix heard no more. He fainted on his bed, and lay there fainting for many minutes.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ALIAS BENYOWSKI.

On Saturday morning, Sydney begged hard for leave to see a paper. The surgeon shook his head doubtfully.

'You excite yourself too much, too much altogether,' he said, 'Benyowski. You should keep more quiet. But as you evidently won't be appeased until you've seen one—well, yes, nurse, you may send out for a *Standard* or a *Telegraph* for him. Don't read it longer than ten minutes altogether, though, mind I tell you.'

When the paper arrived, Sydney turned eagerly to the little paragraphs at the bottom of the fifth page columns.

He knew he would see the notice of the funeral there. Yes, yes, he was not mistaken; here it ran, 'Funeral of Mr. Sydney Chevenix.' Great Heavens, how strange the contrast of that long list of scientific names—half the best-known men in London gone down by special train to his funeral—with his own utter loneliness and desolation there by himself on his solitary bed in Regent's Park Hospital. And a little leaderette upon his death, too; the usual commonplaces of regret and condolence—'one of our most brilliant and promising young men of science . . . famous investigations on the nature of explosives . . . overwrought brain completely broken down with deep and exhausting chemical researches . . . laid rash hands upon himself in a moment, apparently, of unexpected failure . . . long series of experiments resulting at last in temporary discomfiture . . . sincerely condole with his bereaved young widow in the sudden cutting short of so valuable, so promising, and so blameless a life.' Sydney Chevenix laid down the paper with a sigh of relief. For all was safe and snug now, and Sydney Chevenix was dead and buried.

Legally dead and buried, no doubt; and next week, as he learned not long afterwards, Jocelyn Cipriani and Henry Donaldson, the two executors named thereby, duly proved his will at Somerset House, and proceeded to hand over the whole of his estate to his wife, Maimie, in accordance with the provisions therein recited.

So that was the end of Sydney Chevenix.

But on the low bed at Regent's Park Hospital a man of the name of Stanislas Benyowski lay fevered and anxious, repeating to himself in one frenzied delirium the name of Sydney Chevenix's wife, 'Maimie, Maimie, Maimie, Maimie!'

For three weeks he lay there still, and nobody came to ask or inquire for him. Bound up in himself and in his own thoughts, Sydney Chevenix seemed to grow as morose and taciturn as the murdered man whose name and personality he had taken upon him. The nurse or the surgeon sometimes asked him curiously whether he had no friends or relatives with whom he wished to communicate; but Sydney always answered curtly, 'Has a Polish refugee any friends or relatives?'

'You speak English wonderfully well for a foreigner,' the doctor said to him once, half in joke and half in earnest.

'We Poles are all good linguists,' Sydney replied sharply, with a sardonic smile; 'and, indeed, I have lived so long in England that I speak English now better than Polish.' That at least, he thought to himself bitterly, was no falsehood.

The police came, too, on a visit of inquiry. A row had occurred among the Marylebone refugees, and somebody had been shot, though not fatally, and they wanted to get the facts of the case from the man Benyowski. But the man Benyowski could tell them nothing; he had clean forgotten all about it, he said; the last thing he could distinctly remember was his going away from the place where he worked on the evening of the assault, and from that time forth he recollected nothing. He was so perfectly stolid in sticking to this simple non-committing story that the police with all their astuteness could worm nothing out of him.

'It's clear,' the inspector said, shaking his head with an air of profound but baffled wisdom, 'he's afraid to tell us what he knows about the matter. He's terrorized by the others, that's the long and the short of it. It's always the way with these foreigner communist people. Even if you shoot them, they won't peach upon one another. He thinks if he tells nothing now, they may let him off this time with just a bullet through his breast by way of a warning; but if he confesses how it all happened, they'll kill him before long, as safe as houses. And upon my word, if I were in his place, I don't know but that I'd do as he does. It's a deuced awkward thing to have a pack of these lawless communist people down upon you in a regular body. We must keep our eye upon this man Benyowski.'

At the end of three weeks, Sydney Chevenix, alias Benyowski, was sufficiently recovered from the effect of his wound to be allowed to rise and dress himself one morning. As he looked in the glass for the first time since the fatal accident, he was surprised to see how strange a change had come over him in those three long weeks of doubt and terror.

It was not merely that he had lost flesh, that his face had fallen in, that his brow was scored with deep lines, that his cheeks were hollow and his eyes sunken; but beside all

these, a thick growth of stubbly beard, moustache, and whisker completely obscured his clear-cut, delicate, close-shaven features. He started as he caught sight of the curious and unfamiliar face in the glass before him; he would not have known himself for Sydney Chevenix.

Benyowski's clothes sat upon him like sacks; but they made him look even less and less like his real self than he might otherwise have done.

In three days more, the surgeon permitted him to go for a walk. Not more than ten minutes.

Sydney Chevenix knew he must seize the first possible opportunity to escape and lose himself among the outer world. Every day spent at the hospital increased the chances of somebody discovering that he was not Benyowski. He must try to get away at the very first moment from this strained position.

He walked down the great white hospital steps, and passed the porter with a friendly nod. The porter knew him well by sight. There was some suspicion of a mystery about this foreign fellow Benyowski, and the hospital servants had heard how the police examined him in vain, and couldn't discover anything about the source of his accident. There is nothing that attracts your London populace like a good mystery.

As he reached the bottom of the outer steps, and turned the corner towards Regent's Park, a foreign-looking man in a seedy suit raised his hat and addressed him politely, with a very marked German accent.

'I beg your pardon, sir, but I see you come from Regent's Park Hospital. Can you have the goodness to tell me whether you happen to know anything about a patient in the accident ward who goes by the name of Stanislas Benyowski?'

Sydney Chevenix was thrown completely off his guard by the unexpected question. If he had had time to think and to frame his answer to the best advantage, he would have replied simply, 'I know nothing of him. He wasn't in the same ward that I was.' For the one great deception of personating Benyowski—for Maimie's sake—must inevitably lead him into countless minor deceptions and subterfuges, if he kept it up after leaving the hospital.

But as it was, he was so completely taken aback by so strange a coincidence at such an untoward juncture, that he lost his presence of mind completely, and, anxious merely to get away, answered in an unguarded moment the first thing that came into his mind.

'Stanislas Benyowski—why, he was taken out and buried over at Woking, some three or four days since, I fancy.'

Trapmann looked at him with a keen glance of astonished inquiry.

'Impossible!' he cried aloud in German. 'Day and night we've watched the door by turns to see if he escaped, and questioned every patient as he came out. No, no; impossible.' Then turning to Sydney, now pale as death with fear and embarrassment, he went on in English: 'That cannot be; for only half an hour since another patient from the same ward told me the man was doing well and convalescent.'

Sydney's face blanched whiter and whiter still with terror—for Maimie's sake—as he answered lightly with affected carelessness:

'It may be so: I'm sure I don't know much about him; but I'm weak with illness, if you'll kindly excuse me, and I mustn't stand talking here any longer.' And lifting his hat —Benyowski's hat—he tried to move away in haste around the corner.

In a second, Trapmann's experienced eye recognised at a flash the clothing that Sydney was wearing; and making a hasty sign to a second Nihilist, the ill-shaven Russian, who was loitering about casually on the pavement opposite, to follow and watch the suspicious stranger, he ran rapidly up the hospital steps, now fully determined to put his head into the lion's mouth, and boldly ask at the hall-door for the man he had murdered. Your Nihilist is never the sort of person to deal on emergency in half-measures.

'Is there a patient still here,' he asked without flinching, 'who goes by the name of Stanislas Benyowski?'

'Benyowski!' the porter repeated with some surprise. 'Why, that's him by the corner there as you yourself have just been a-speaking to.'

Without so much as waiting to raise his hat or thank the

porter, Trapmann darted down the steps again and round the corner, in hot pursuit of Sydney Chevenix. A plot! A plot! He saw it all now, as clear as daylight. That wretched traitor Benyowski, to elude detection and escape the Nihilists, knowing they would lie in wait for him, had changed clothes and name with this other fellow, and was lurking still uncaught in the wards of the hospital, meaning to go out, no doubt, under some ridiculous disguise, and slip away from England to America. But not beyond reach of the organization—ha, ha! Whatever happened, he must be secured and gagged, by death or otherwise, lest he betray the secrets of the Provisional Council to Alexander Alexandrovitch and his miserable mouchards of the Third Section.

One minute more, and he had overtaken Sydney, who shuffled, weak and panting, down a shabby side street in the direction of the York and Albany, dogged close at heel by the ill-shaven Russian.

Trapmann came upon him suddenly from behind.

'Liar,' he cried in a stern tone of reproach, 'Stanislas Benyowski is NOT dead, and you are wearing his coat and hat this moment! You have changed clothes and names with him to cover a disgraceful villainy, and you are trying to personate him for purposes of your own. Better tell the whole truth right out at once, and come with us, or it will be the worse in the end for you. I am a private detective.'

Sydney Chevenix trembled terribly. To cover a disgraceful villainy! A private detective! It was all up, then! They had found out all—all about Maimie! A cold shiver ran unheeded down his back, and he almost fainted on the spot with dismay and weakness.

'Call a cab,' Trapmann cried authoritatively to the ill-shaven Russian.

Sydney supported himself feebly against the wall.

'Where are you going to take me?' he asked in a frenzy of agony. It was all up: they were going to the Marlborough Street Police Station, no doubt, and Maimie's happiness would be ruined for ever.

'Never mind where we are going to take you,' Trapmann answered severely. 'You may as well go quietly with us. It will be better for you in the long run.'

For the first time in his whole life, Sydney realized the utter helplessness of a man without a name or station. He was abjectly powerless in the men's hands. He could not raise a single finger against them. He must go without protest wherever they took him. Even if he had really known who they were, he dared not appeal to the police for protection, lest the whole truth should come out—that he was not Stanislas Benyowski, and that the man buried at Woking Cemetery as Sydney Chevenix was really the Pole of whom they were in search. Better risk going with them blindly at once than rush upon that certain exposure and defeat.

The cab drew up by the kerb, and Trapmann, nothing abashed, bowed Sydney politely into the far corner. Then he got in himself, with the Russian opposite him, and they drove off, Sydney knew not whither, for some twenty minutes.

When the cab stopped again, they were in a side street in Soho; and the Russian, getting out first, rang the bell, and inquired in French for Mdlle. Vera Trotsky.

Then Sydney knew where the men had taken him, and what was the meaning of their strange proceeding. Thank God, thank God, they were not detectives; they were not policemen; they were only Nihilists!

A Nihilist to Sydney was just then a sort of unconscious sworn brother. He could have seized Trapmann's hand in his own in an access of wild joy and wrung it cordially, for he felt sure these were the murderers of Stanislas Benyowski. These were the murderers, and he could fraternize with them. They would be every bit as glad as he himself was to escape detection. They would be pleased to acquiesce in his little subterfuge. They would aid and abet him in the disguise he had adopted.

That they were banded assassins and common murderers mattered less than nothing to Sydney Chevenix nowadays. He had one fixed idea, and one idea only—to save Maimie, and to make her happy at whatever sacrifice. Besides, what was murder now to him? Had not even Maimie—but no, no, he was still alive and well and in evidence, and Maimie's character was stainless as ever.

'Watch him,' Trapmann said in German to his shabby confederate, ushering Sydney and the Russian into a room together. 'I go to speak to Fraülein Trotsky.'

The man bowed silently, and Sydney, weak with illness and distress, but now much reassured, since they turned out to be only murderers, not officers of the law, sat calmly down to await his reappearance.

In about a quarter of an hour Trapmann returned, and with him came Mdlle. Vera Trotsky.

The moment the fair-haired secretary's eyes rested on Sydney, she gave a sudden start, and a little hasty glance of recognition.

'I have met him before,' she said. 'I know who he is, friend Trapmann. It—it was from him I learned that Benyowski was a traitor. . . . There is destiny in this. The Unconscious has worked, in its own strange way, one of its own mysterious purposeful coincidences.'

Sydney Chevenix rose and bowed to her courteously. He did not understand what she said in Russian, but he caught with preternatural acuteness at the name of Benyowski, and he saw at a glance that she remembered having talked with him at Sir Antony Wraxall's.

'We have met before, mademoiselle,' he said eagerly in French, their common language. 'You know who I am, and I know who you are. We have each our own purposes to serve. Let us be frank with one another, and strike a bargain. You know that I am not the man I pretend to be; and I—I know for my part that you have between you —let us say it plainly—conspired to murder Stanislas Benyowski.'

Vera Trotsky, without moving a muscle of her face, or betraying the faintest token of surprise or emotion, took a chair herself, and beckoned Sydney into one. Then she sat opposite him quietly, with her elbows on the table, looking across at his pale, thin face with cat-like watchfulness.

'Well,' she said in slow and measured tones, 'so far, good. What else have you got to communicate, monsieur?'

'Only this,' Sydney answered, emboldened by her calmness, but knowing all the while that he was playing for a

life-and-death stake with these desperate people: 'Benyowski is dead—dead and buried.'

Vera Trotsky and Trapmann exchanged hurried glances across the table.

'How do you know it?' the fair-haired girl asked at last, after a long pause, with breathless interest.

'I will tell you very briefly the whole story,' Sydney went on, sustained in spite of his weakness by the excitement of the moment. 'I was taken to the hospital a few weeks back with a serious wound, on the same evening as Stanislas Benyowski. For reasons of my own, which I need not disclose to you—you, monsieur and mademoiselle, must surely know well that a man may often have his private reasons'—Vera Trotsky nodded impatiently, as though the parenthetical statement were an obvious platitude—'for reasons of my own, then,' Sydney went on more boldly, 'I wished to have it considered by my family that I was dead and buried. Benyowski, who formerly worked for me, as you know, was brought in wounded shortly after into the same hospital. He occupied the next bed to mine. For the rest, there was no chance of his ever recovering. When he died, I seized the opportunity to change his corpse, in the absence of the nurse, into my own bed. In doing so, I fortunately, though unintentionally, overturned a paraffin lamp, which set fire to the bed where Benyowski was lying.'

'Yes, yes,' Trapmann interrupted shortly in English; 'we know all that. We watched the fire. We had our scouts in attendance. And the body that the inquest was finally held on—the body said to be that of a man Chevenix——'

'Was Stanislas Benyowski's. I am Chevenix, as you know, mademoiselle. There you have the whole history.'

Vera Trotsky and Trapmann conversed quickly for a few minutes together in Russian, and then Vera, turning to Sydney, began again:

'What do you intend doing now?' she asked simply.

'I have no intentions,' Sydney answered with a sad smile. 'My one wish is to be buried and forgotten. I have put off my own personality altogether, and I desire to be lost in the crowd and never more recognised. I am dead to all

who ever knew me; I must go forth into the world another person.'

'You are really the man Chevenix, I suppose?' Trapmann once more interrupted suspiciously.

'Yes, yes,' Vera Trotsky put in at once, with a hasty twirl of her bent forefinger; 'that is the name. I met him at Miladi's. I recollect it—I recollect it.'

It was impossible for Sydney to do otherwise than coincide in the recognition.

The two Nihilists conversed together once more for a few seconds, and then Vera Trotsky spoke again:

'It would save us a great deal of trouble and difficulty, monsieur,' she said politely, 'if you were to continue to bear before the world at large the name of Benyowski. We should have a Benyowski always *en évidence* then, to point to in triumph in case we were ever required to produce him. And the police, too, must have seen you and interrogated you. That would certainly be very convenient.'

'As you will,' Sydney answered. 'Then it is a compact between us. I will not betray you, and you will not betray me? I do not wish my existence as Sydney Chevenix to be even guessed at.'

'You will not betray us, monsieur! Why, you have no evidence against us, surely?' the girl answered with a deprecatory wave of her small hand. 'There need be no compact. But, yes, if you wish it; we will agree to keep each other's counsel. We understand these motives perfectly, we others. Is it not so, Trapmann?'

There was a pause; and then Vera Trotsky asked once more, in a business-like voice:

'Where do you mean to sleep to-night, monsieur? Have you any money?'

Sydney felt in his pocket for Benyowski's purse. He opened it, and found in it a few shillings, and his own cheque, still uncashed, given on the very afternoon of the murder.

'I have this,' he said, showing it to the girl fearlessly. He understood at once that these good honest Nihilists (red-handed as he knew them to be) were no mere vulgar robbers and cut-throats. . . . Why . . . if it came to that,

it was he himself, after all, who was the robber. He was robbing the dead Benyowski, his heirs, executors, and assignees, of several shillings and a quarter's salary. . . . but it was his own cheque . . . his own signature . . . his own money lying at the banker's. It was all he would ever take from Maimie's fortune. For was he not dead and buried now? and the balance at the bank was all Maimie's.

Vera Trotsky glanced sidelong at the cheque, and noted the signature.

'Fortunately it is payable to bearer, not to order,' she said, with perfect calmness. 'Otherwise there might have been a difficulty in getting the money. This is your signature, of course, M. Chevenix. Ah, yes; I thought so. Have the goodness, monsieur, to take this pen and write your name here on this piece of paper.'

She spoke authoritatively, like one accustomed to command, and Sydney obeyed her at once without demur. The girl compared the two signatures with a searching glance, and then passed the cheque and the paper over to Trapmann, who smiled and nodded.

'I believe he may be trusted,' she said in French. 'Benyowski is really dead. At any rate, we will test him. And if he proves to be telling us lies——'

A significant gesture amply supplied the end of the sentence. Sydney comprehended it with perfect ease, and frigidly bowed his sarcastic acknowledgments. She had thrust an aërial knife with her delicate small hand into the shadowy heart of an imaginary victim.

'Would you like monsieur to cash this for you?' the girl asked, waving the cheque toward Trapmann.

'I thank you, mademoiselle,' Sydney answered politely.

'Take it, M. Trapmann,' Vera Trotsky said, handing it to him. 'Monsieur, you had better stop with us here in this house for the present. It will be some little temporary guarantee of your good faith in action. Your liberty will not be in any way interfered with; only, you must not go out unaccompanied. Shall I ask madame the proprietor if she can spare a comfortable room for you?'

'Thanks,' Sydney answered with perfect frankness. He was beginning now to enter with zest into the spirit of the

situation. 'Nothing on earth could possibly suit me better. I wish to have time to disappear from society; to let my beard grow longer; to alter my external appearance as far as possible; in one word, to assume altogether another personality. When I left the hospital just now, I had no plans, and did not know where to turn in my utter helplessness. I thank you for your hospitality and your kind introductions. It is possible that we may yet be useful to one another.'

Mdlle. Vera bowed and laughed.

'You are a brave man,' she said. 'For the rest, I like you. You come among us, and you show no fear. And yet, if we chose, at a moment's notice, do you know we could blow up all this house and every living soul that is in it?' And she pointed carelessly to a singular row of little cases that stood grim and gaunt upon the bookshelf opposite.

Sydney smiled.

'An old pattern, mademoiselle,' he said calmly. 'I know them well. The same sort as the ones used in the attempt on the Czar's life at the Jaroslav railway station. You forget that I am not a man to be easily frightened by dynamite and clockwork. I, too, am of the initiated.'

Mdlle. Vera started and showed her pretty teeth.

'I forgot,' she said. 'You are in the dynamite trade yourself. But I like you all the better for it. Brave men are always our brothers. I will arrange at once for the room with madame.'

In half an hour's time, Trapmann came back with the cash from the bank, and counted it out with scrupulous accuracy to Sydney.

'They said the cheque was dated on the very day of the suicide,' he observed, 'and that it would probably be the last they would ever cash for that signature. And I explained that Mr. Benyowski had been suffering from an accident, and had been unable to send it in for payment sooner. Besides, they were evidently accustomed to cashing similar cheques previously.'

So that night, Sydney Chevenix slept in the very midst of the Nihilist conspirators; and strange to say, for the first time since the night of the accident—he always thought of

it to himself as the accident—he slept as soundly and as peacefully as a baby. Half the load was lifted off his mind now. He believed at last he had really succeeded in saving Maimie.

For now, at any rate, Sydney Chevenix was beyond all doubt dead and buried, and he himself was nobody else, by universal consent, but Stanislas Benyowski. Even Benyowski's own friends and associates were prepared to come forward and attest his identity.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

EVENLY MATCHED.

For a week or two after the inquest, Maimie's nerves were completely shattered, and Jocelyn Cipriani thought it best that she should go away for a while to the sea-side for rest and change, such as befitted her condition. Jocelyn suggested a cottage at Silbury; and Hetty cried out at him for a monster accordingly. Go to Silbury, indeed, where her poor father had lost his life suddenly a year before, when she was now suffering from the still more sudden and horrible shock of her husband's suicide! You men are always so unfeeling! You have no tact and no sympathy!'

And Maimie quite agreed with her. She would be moped to death, she said, at Silbury. She wanted to be taken out of herself, and to see new scenes and different people.

So she went down to Brighton, while things were unsettled, and Hetty went with her to take care of her and keep her company. A drive on the King's Road daily, and a first glimpse of that perpetual panorama of vulgar ostentatiousness that unrolls itself for ever on the long sea-front from Kemp Town to Cliftonville did Maimie good; it was her idea of life, the sort of thing she really relished: and it helped to banish for awhile from her mind the memory of that terrible accident of poor dear Sydney's. For Maimie did not know what remorse meant; she was very sorry at the moment for what she had done, and very

frightened at the possible consequences for a few days after; but as soon as the coroner's jury had brought it in temporary insanity—that cheap and insulting refuge from the coarse barbarism of a practically obsolete law—her mind was completely set at rest, and she felt in the simple language of French Assemblies that the incident of the explosive was now closed.

Anyhow, she couldn't come back to Beaumont Terrace; that was certain. The abiding associations of the place would be too dreadful. She must take a new house somewhere else in the neighbourhood, not very far from dear old Jocelyn's, for herself—and Adrian. For of course Maimie took it for granted now that Adrian would marry her. Poor dear Sydney, how happy he would have been (for he was really fond of her) if only he had known that she would be comfortably married, when he was gone, to dear Adrian!

'Of course, darling,' she said to Hetty, with a confidential nod of her baby head, so quaintly and quakerishly pretty in the incongruous head-dress of a widow's cap—'of course, darling, I shouldn't like to be very far away, you know, from you and Jocelyn; you have always been such dear kind friends to me since I first knew you, and more than ever in this terrible trouble: so if Jocelyn would just look out a house for me somewhere in the neighbourhood, and see about selling all the old furniture, and getting somebody to fit it up for me without any fuss or worry, so that I might go back to the new house and find everything all straight and proper—you see, dear, I don't understand business—I should be so awfully obliged and grateful.'

So Jocelyn, acting upon the rich young widow's very vague instructions, took her a house in Wilmington Crescent, close by his own just round the corner, and sold up all the furniture of the old home, and duly paid off and dismissed the servants, including in the number Hannah Gowland. Maimie didn't wish anything in the new rooms to remind her in any way of the painful old ones.

'Take nothing out of the house but my own clothes and any little things that were quite my own, dear Jocelyn,' she wrote to him candidly; 'and sell up everything else from top to bottom as soon as possible. I am so miserable!'

When Hannah Gowland unexpectedly received notice to go, she felt as if a knife had been plunged into her heart. But she said nothing; she merely stood and curtseyed respectfully; and the round spot that always burned bright red in the centre of her pale cheek deepened and widened so fiercely and instantaneously that Jocelyn Cipriani said to himself:

'Poor girl! poor girl! Like all the rest of us, she must have been positively in love with our poor little Maimie.'

At the end of six weeks Maimie came back to Wilmington Crescent, to a new house and a new household, which Jocelyn and the upholsterers had arranged between them to her perfect satisfaction. And on that same day, dreading a first evening alone by herself among the fresh surroundings, she telegraphed to Adrian Pym at Oxford, 'Come up at once. I want to speak with you.'

Adrian Pym came up as he was bid, and reached the new house at eight in the evening. Maimie was sitting in the drawing-room alone, waiting to receive him, with her widow's weeds—too black and white, perhaps, to suit her complexion—but with a little bunch of subdued hot-house flowers stuck carelessly into her bosom by way of relieving the dismal monotony. As he entered she rose, beautiful as ever, and held out both her hands, with a flushing face, to greet him eagerly.

'Adrian,' she cried, 'my darling, my darling! I couldn't wait one minute longer without you. I thought before this you would have come to see me of your own accord. You have quite forsaken me—quite forsaken me.'

Adrian sat down on the sofa beside her, and kissed her lips once as of old, unreproved. Then his hand stole quietly and unobtrusively into hers; and they sat there silent for twenty minutes, in that mute society which is sometimes far too eloquently expressive for any form of words adequately to rival.

At last Maimie withdrew her fingers for a moment from his grasp, and asked simply:

'How do you like the new house, Adrian?'

The strange question, so unexpectedly put, brought Adrian back to himself suddenly.

'I like it very much, Maimie,' he answered with a start, gazing at her childish innocent face in something half-way between wonder and admiration. 'It looks extremely pretty, I'm sure . . . as far as I've seen it.'

Maimie rose, and taking his hand once more, led the way with girlish timidity into a small back room behind the drawing-room, furnished as a library.

'Look here, darling,' she said, gripping him still tightly by the hand, as if afraid to lose her grasp of him; 'this room I mean for your study, Adrian.'

'Whenever I come here?' Adrian said interrogatively.

'*When* you come here,' Maimie answered with emphasis. 'Whenever that may be, you will come to stop for always, I suppose, darling.'

Adrian gazed at her with a throbbing heart.

'Maimie, Maimie,' he cried, 'you are too delicious. So it's all settled, is it? You've arranged this house, then, for both of us, have you? My darling, my darling, you are too good to me. Will you take me, Maimie? Will you take me, my sweetheart?'

Maimie led him back again with a bursting bosom to the big drawing-room. It was a terrible ordeal; but still, she must go through with it. Before she answered Adrian's question, she must tell him everything—everything—everything. Truthful to the last, she must not deceive him. She must not marry him with that horrible secret undisclosed between them. For though she didn't often dwell upon it now—except alone at night—and though all chance of detection was fairly past—past for ever—it *was* horrible; there was no denying it. Besides, perhaps Adrian, when he came to hear how it all happened, mightn't care to marry a—well, a girl who had accidentally shot her first husband. She must have no secrets from dear Adrian, whatever came of it—even if he rejected her, dismissed her, trampled her under foot. She must have sympathy, sympathy from *him*. She must not deceive her darling, her darling.

'Adrian,' she said, seating him beside her tremulously upon the sofa, and leaning over towards him with a beseeching look in her great brown eyes, 'the real question is not that, but will *you* take *me?* My darling, my darling, I have

something to tell you first.' Then in a frightened sobbing undertone, without preface or apology, without note or comment, 'Adrian, Adrian, it was I—I—who shot Sydney.'

Adrian seized her tenderly in his arms.

'Little pet,' he whispered, 'my beautiful, delicate, innocent little Maimie, I ought to have told you long before now that I knew it: I knew it, Maimie; I knew it perfectly. My darling, my darling, to think that you should trouble your sweet little head about breaking to me such a trifle—a nothing—an accident. Of course, Maimie, I knew you shot him. . . . And I knew for whose sake, too, you did it, my angel.'

'Then you don't hate me for it?' Maimie cried, half aloud, flinging herself wildly upon the strong man's bosom and letting her tears fall like summer showers. 'You don't despise me! You don't reject me! You aren't angry with me! My darling! my darling! I love you! I love you!'

Adrian answered never a word, but soothed her hand tenderly with his own, and let her cling to him and cry her heartful undisturbed.

By-and-by, Maimie raised her head a moment from his shoulder and looked at him again.

'Adrian,' she whispered, 'darling Adrian,—I didn't do it quite on purpose. It was half an accident, more than half an accident. I'll tell you just how it all happened. I was in the laboratory that afternoon with poor dear Sydney——'

Adrian stroked her cheek fondly.

'My darling Maimie,' he answered with a reassuring caress, 'I need no explanation, no excuse, no shadow of apology, no exculpation. I can read your dear little womanly heart like an open book to the very bottom. I understand exactly how you did it, every bit as much as if I had seen you do it. I know it was a mere impulse—the impulse of a moment. And I know for whose sake the impulse came across you like a flash of lightning. I don't want to hear any more about it. . . . Maimie, Maimie—it may sound too wicked and too terrible even for you to listen to—but I love you for it, my darling—I love you for

it all the better. I know now how much you would do and dare for me, Maimie.'

Maimie drew back from him, half terrified.

'Adrian,' she said solemnly, peering deep into his cold blue eyes with a piercing glance from her own big brown ones, 'I believe, my darling, you are even wickeder than I am.'

Adrian smiled a cynical smile.

'Why, of course I am, darling,' he answered calmly. 'When a man of my abilities and intelligence is really wicked, he's a thousand times wickeder in every way, I suppose, than a dear little innocent girl like you could ever possibly make herself, Maimie.'

'That's quite true,' Maimie replied, nodding sagely. 'I did it in a moment of impulse, Adrian, and I was sorry for it the moment I'd done it: whereas you—you justify it and glory in it, my darling. . . . And yet, Adrian, I can't be sorry for it, for it's left me free to marry you, after all, my sweetheart.'

Adrian seized her once more in his arms.

'Maimie, Maimie,' he cried passionately, 'we're each just wicked enough for one another. I would never marry any other woman but you, Maimie. Our very faults are exactly adapted one to the other. . . . Maimie . . . Maimie . . .' in a very low hushed voice, 'thank you, my darling, for shooting Sydney.'

'Oh, Adrian,' Maimie cried, drawing back in terror and hiding her face awe-struck in her hands. 'You frighten me when you talk like that! You're the wickedest of the two! After all, you're the wickedest!'

'That's well, little one,' Adrian answered with a calm smile. 'Now I've made myself *particeps criminis*, as we lawyers say: I'm an accessory after the fact, indeed, and as such liable to be punished for the act every bit as much as you are. So, if you like, and if it would relieve your poor little heart, darling, you may tell me all about just how it happened. I dare say you 'll feel all the better in the end for making a clean breast of it once for all to a father-confessor.'

So Maimie, leaning close upon his shoulder, and with many sobs and tears and compunctions, began her story,

and told him word for word how it all came about, omitting not a single item, or speech, or thought of her heart, in her full, free, and eager confession. Adrian listened with a compassionate smile playing about the clear-cut corners of his mouth; and when she had finished, he kissed her tenderly upon the forehead once more, and waited to hear what else she had to say to him.

'Well, Adrian,' she whispered at last, in a terrified voice, 'then you won't be afraid even so to marry me?'

'Afraid, Maimie! Afraid of you, my darling! Afraid to accomplish the one long wish of my heart for ever! . . . Maimie, Maimie, listen to me, dearest. A man never loves with all the force and fire of his nature save once in his life, and once only. I have heard it said often, and I used to think before it was a mere fiction of the novelists and poets. But I know it now: I know it by experience. A boy may fancy he has felt what love means—with his little sentimental sighs and phrases; but when a man has reached my years, Maimie, he really knows: he knows and feels it—he loves with all the stored-up force and passion of his entire nature. Maimie, Maimie, I love you: I love you: I have always loved you: I shall love you for ever.'

The beautiful girl played with his hand half unconsciously.

'And to think,' she said, with a meditative sigh, 'that if they only ever found out about it, they would actually hang me just for that, Adrian!'

Adrian gave a hasty deprecatory gesture.

'Don't talk of it, darling,' he cried with a shiver, looking around him cautiously. 'Don't let the very walls and ceilings hear you mention it. But the English law—the English law—I know it too well, too well, Maimie—that crystallized record of the follies and barbarities and puerilities of our ancestors—the English law does strange things indeed and hideous in all these matters. I have seen a strong brute of a hulking man sentenced to fourteen days' imprisonment for kicking his wife within an inch of her life with his hobnailed boots; and a poor, shrinking, slender, delicate girl, on the self-same day, sentenced to death for preventing a senseless new-born baby from draw-

ing a breath the very first moment of its poor little hopeless, helpless life-time. Don't talk about it, Maimie; it's too terrible. The great, stolid, thick-headed British juryman would have no mercy or pity in his dull heart even for you, —for you, my darling. Before it came to that, Maimie—we would die in our own way, I think, by ourselves together.'

'Adrian, Adrian, if it was only with you, I don't think I should be afraid to face it.'

There was silence for a while, and then Maimie began again.

'How soon do you think, Adrian, we might . . .' And she looked at him interrogatively.

'Not certainly till after twelve months are well over,' Adrian answered regretfully.

'Twelve months, Adrian! Must we really wait a whole long twelve months, darling? Twelve dreadful, horrid, weary months, Adrian! Why, it'll be almost as bad as when you used to go away in September from Silbury, and never come back again at all to see me till the next summer. But, at any rate, you'll come and see me *very* often this time, won't you, Adrian? Every Sunday, and whenever else you can manage to get away from Oxford. Promise me darling.'

Adrian bent his head in silent acquiescence.

'Maimie,' he said, 'we're dreadfully wicked, both of us: just about wicked enough for one another.'

Maimie nestled still closer to his side.

'Well, that's a comfort,' she said, 'anyhow: for then we shan't ever be shocked or horrified at anything either of us may do or say, you know. . . . Adrian . . . darling . . . do tell me: don't you think six months would be quite long enough? . . . I shall be so lonely: so terribly lonely, without either you or poor dear Sydney.'

Adrian jumped up, and paced the room wildly, with uncontrollable passion.

'Maimie, Maimie,' he cried in a frenzy of transport, 'it'll be very foolish, very unwise of you, very compromising. People will talk about it, you may be sure they'll talk about it, if you do anything so rash and unconventional.

For your sake, I ought to say *No* firmly and at once to it. But I'm like a child in your hands whenever I come near you: I lose all my manliness and firmness and resolution. You bewitch me, you enchant me, you cast some extraordinary spell and witchcraft over me. Do as you will, darling: do as you will. In six months—in six months let it be, then.'

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A NEW MAN.

For two or three weeks, while still only convalescent, Sydney Chevenix remained not uncontentedly at the Russian lodging-house in the back street of Soho. Nihilist companionship is better after all than absolute solitude; and Sydney knew nowhere else to go, even if it had been competent to him to go where he pleased at any minute. The Nihilists, to be sure, did not interfere at all with his freedom of action in most matters; but he felt, for all that, he was under surveillance. Still, he minded such slight restraint but very little. The Nihilists would soon find out he was no traitor, and perfectly harmless, and then they would let him go his way in peace to find his own level in the great city. Meanwhile, he didn't wish to leave the house; walking about the streets of London would be very dangerous, until his beard was well grown, and his appearance otherwise somewhat altered. As to his future, he had as yet no plans whatever; he only knew in a vague and indefinite fashion he wanted to save Maimie, and to watch always over Maimie's happiness.

Slowly, however, the practical question began to rise up and frame itself vividly before him, how was he ever to gain his livelihood henceforth, and procure the means of watching over Maimie? It is easy enough to resolve heroically in a moment of emotion that you will give up your all and begin life over again; the real heroism comes fairly into play when you try to carry your quixotic resolution into practical action. Sydney Chevenix was brave enough and strong enough to pursue his resolution to

the bitter end: but how to set to work about it in the first place puzzled him sorely.

To be sure, he had Benyowski's money—the dead man's stolen money—to go on upon for the immediate present; but twenty-five pounds won't last for ever; and for the first time in his life Sydney Chevenix began to reflect to himself that a hundred a year had been really a very beggarly salary to offer an accomplished chemist like Stanislas Benyowski. One looks at these matters so very differently, to be sure, according as one happens to be paymaster or recipient. It had oddly happened to Sydney Chevenix in the present case to be both together. Living is certainly not expensive in the slums of Soho; but, even there, twenty-five pounds is no fortune. Then, again, when the wretched pittance was once spent, he couldn't take a second time to surgery. To be a surgeon, one must be duly qualified; and to be duly qualified, he must be Sydney Chevenix, not Stanislas Benyowski. There remained, then, only that refuge of the destitute—the pen. Literature or journalism, struggle or starvation; he must try his hand at it, one way or the other. If only he could earn just enough to keep himself, all would be well, and he would yet be able to watch over Maimie.

At the end of a week or two, he asked Trapmann one morning to bring him in a bottle of black hair-dye and some stain for the complexion—a nice deep Italian olive-brown, if any could be obtained at the shops in the neighbourhood. Trapmann brought them—he was a frequent visitor; and Sydney was astonished at the sudden transformation which he wrought upon himself in a few days with these simple materials. His beard and moustache had now grown to a considerable length, and when he had dyed them deep black, and changed his skin to a rich Tuscan brown, and cut his long fair hair short and swarthy like an Italian waiter's, and otherwise altered his personal appearance as far as possible, he could hardly even recognise himself (in Benyowski's clothes) for the Sydney Chevenix of a few weeks ago. His figure, even, was decidedly different. The trouble and anxiety of those long feverish nights had bowed him visibly; the bullet-wound had

caused him to stoop in the back and to halt a little; and the effect of cutting off his long hair, that used to cover his neck to the coat-collar, had altered his look marvellously even from behind. He laughed to himself as he thought with a grim pleasure that even Maimie, if she ever saw him, couldn't possibly recognise him for her own husband. He was no longer himself, even in outer show; he was another man, legally and bodily.

'Why do you want to change yourself so?' Vera Trotsky asked him with suspicious curiosity, as he passed her one morning on his way down the narrow staircase.

Sydney looked at her for a moment in faltering hesitation.

'Tenez, mademoiselle,' he said at last, taking her hand and silently leading her into her own little sitting-room. 'You are a woman. You will understand me. I will trust you with all. I will make a confidence of the entire history to you.' If he himself should ever die, he thought rapidly, it would be better so—better for Maimie that somebody should know the whole truth about it.

Vera Trotsky listened attentively while Sydney told her in brief words and unvarnished the whole story of that pathetic episode. Then she said in a very firm and quiet voice, as soon as he was finished:

'And for her sake, you mean to give up everything, monsieur? For her sake, you are willing to die a civil death, and become nobody with nothing in your pocket?'

Sydney answered shortly, 'I am willing, mademoiselle.'

Vera Trotsky took his hand admiringly in hers with an unwonted access of feminine softness.

'My friend,' she said in very gentle accents, 'you are a brave man. You have made a noble sacrifice. I believe every word of what you have said. I see it in your eyes. It is impossible to doubt it. . . . You have suffered much. I sympathize with you. . . . You are a strong man—a true man—an earnest man; you ought to have been one of us; you ought to have been a Nihilist. You should have been joined to one of us others, and not to the Englishwoman. . . . My friend, I admire you. Count upon me. If there is anything I can do for you in any way, at any time, ask it of me. . . . When would you like to leave this house, and

what do you mean to do on leaving? We are friends. I can trust you. You will never betray us. Strong men and brave women are friends and brothers all the world over. A badge, a name, a party, what is it? Nihilist or communist, nothing, nothing. But brave hearts, true tongues, enduring spirits, they are the genuine signs and tokens of fraternity. I press your hand. It is friendship: it is solidarity. . . . What are your plans and your ideas for the future?'

A woman's sympathy is always grateful to a man in adversity, even though the woman herself who gives it be an adamantine communist. Sydney told her his schemes—such as they were—with frank friendliness. Vera Trotsky listened, and sighed imperceptibly.

'Hard work, hard work,' she said. 'It will not be easy. I hope from my heart you will prove successful.'

So that very day, in the shades of evening, Sydney Chevenix ventured to prowl out to his old neighbourhood, and there discovered, by careful side inquiry, that Maimie had taken a new house, and that Jocelyn Cipriani was furnishing it for her.

He walked along to Maimie's future home, in Wilmington Crescent, and there found, to his great delight, that a lodging-house was situated exactly opposite it. He hugged himself in silence. Providence seemed to favour all his designs. He went in, and asked for apartments. A hard-faced woman showed him a sitting-room on the second floor. It was thirty shillings a week—an enormous sum in these days; but Sydney, fingering the money in his pocket tremulously, agreed to take it. He would come in, he said, to-morrow evening. Reference?—no, he had no reference in the neighbourhood; he was a foreigner, a stranger, a sojourner in the land (name, Benyowski); but if the landlady liked, he would pay the first week's rent in advance, in lieu of references. Money is the best possible testimonial to character in this realm of England; the strangely named foreigner was a respectable man—he was in possession of a gold sovereign and ten shillings.

Next day Sydney installed himself duly in his room; and a few evenings later, through the half-closed Venetians, dimly,

he saw Maimie return from Brighton, and an unknown man of very professional appearance came in a cab, by himself, to see her.

Sydney had never beheld him before, but he knew from the photograph in Maimie's album that it was Adrian Pym, the tutor of St. Boniface.

That was a hard hour indeed for Sydney; but Maimie—Maimie—Maimie was happy! He could see her shadow against the blind now and then, and Adrian's too, in earnest converse apparently with Maimie. Sydney had put his hand to the plough, and he would not turn back. Enough for him if Maimie was happy—happy with Adrian.

So soon, so soon! Then he was forgotten already! A bitter thought, but Sydney stifled it. Maimie willed it so. He must bow to Maimie. Thank heaven, at least the sense of having killed him had not crushed her. His whole being now was merged and swallowed up in that single idea—how to make Maimie happy.

The morning after, he sat down early at his little table, and taking out a sheet or two of white foolscap that he had laid in beforehand, he began to try his hand for the first time in his life at literary labour, other than a memoir for the Royal Society. It was a short article for a London evening paper—a little fancy sketch of a Polish dynamiter: in fact, a portrait in character of the real Benyowski as he himself had known and seen him. He must do something in earnest for his livelihood now, for already he had reached almost the last sovereign of the twenty-five inherited from Stanislas Benyowski. He had felt compelled to bring in a little luggage, for appearance' sake, and to buy himself a few changes of linen. There was hardly any small change left now: and though Vera Trotsky had said to him at parting, 'We are a poor folk, we Nihilists, my friend, but at a pinch we can always lend a brother in difficulties a spare pound or two,' he would have been loth indeed to fall back in his last distress on such strange assistance.

He wrote carefully, and with great pains, for Maimie's sake, as he did everything.

When he had finished the article and strictly corrected it, he wrote at the top in his bold hand, 'Stanislas Ben-

yowski, 42, Wilmington Crescent,' and sent it off by the next post to the office of the paper. It was with some trepidation that he awaited the result. He must manage to make a livelihood somehow, or else what was to become of Miamie?

Next evening's post brought him a short letter from the editor, enclosing a cheque for three guineas. 'Your article is admirable,' it said briefly. 'Send some more in the same line. I shall be glad to hear from you as often as you are able.'

Three guineas is a great sum. It will pay two weeks' rent, and leave a couple of shillings or so over. But that was not all. It was prospective wealth: it was a profession, a career, an opening, a livelihood. Sydney Chevenix took heart of grace once more. He might begin his life in earnest over again. After all, things in that way were not much worse than before he inherited his rich uncle's estates and money. He could still push his way in the world. But he had nothing to push it for now, to be sure, save that one thing—to watch over Maimie's happiness.

The mine of wealth thus unexpectedly discovered did not prove in the end to be a deceptive one. In a few days more Sydney had sent in three articles, all of which the friendly editor had immediately printed. Not only so, but after a week had passed, he wrote to ask whether Mr. Benyowski would care to review a parcel of books, forwarded herewith, which offer Sydney rightly interpreted as equivalent to an irregular engagement on the staff of the paper. So now the question of bare livelihood was easily and satisfactorily settled, beyond the utmost dreams of Sydney Chevenix's modest avarice. After all, when man has but himself to provide for, man wants but little here below, nor wants that little long. It is the pressing necessities of wife and children that drive us all to worship sordidly at the base shrine of hateful Mammon. Ships sail the sea, and railways score the country-side, and merchants go daily down into the dull city, and men toil naked underground in stifling mines, and a vast commercial pother and turmoil fills the giddy world with its hum and bustle, and all for what?—

for the wife and child who sit at home in their ease and comfort, and know nothing of the throes by which it is provided for them. So Sydney Chevenix wondered now what a man could ever find to do with money, who had no wife, and no desire to discover a new explosive.

For the explosive, too, was dead and buried, like Sydney Chevenix whose brain had conceived it. Sydney had discovered at that one trial how dangerous an engine of possible crime he was putting into the hands of the merest baby. If dear little harmless Maimie herself could be tempted into murder by so easy an instrument, what would be the effect of the noiseless explosive upon the hardened natures of the really wicked? To Sydney Chevenix the explosive had been like a petted child, and to give it up was to give up everything. But he *had* given up everything for Maimie's sake; and so long as only Maimie was happy, he could let the explosive and all the world go to rack and ruin, and never care to reckon his loss in it.

So Sydney stopped and settled down at peace in the Crescent lodgings, working away honestly as a journeyman journalist for a precarious wage, and spending much of his leisure time in sitting at the window, behind a muslin curtain, watching Maimie—Maimie and Adrian. He seldom ventured out in the daytime, disguised as he was, for fear she should recognise him; but when he did, he followed Maimie at a great distance, tracking her out along the street as a dog tracks the footsteps of his master, and grateful even for those slight transient glimpses of her beautiful presence. Twice he passed her openly in town by accident, and then he trembled violently lest Maimie should know him. But Maimie, with a placid smile of total unconcern on her sunny little face, looked up at the dark stranger and caught his eyes dreamily for a second, and then passed on unmoved by a moment's suspicion. Sydney lived on the memory of those unconscious smiles for whole long days and sleepless nights afterward.

By-and-by that lonely gloomy taciturn man, sitting by the window at the lodgings opposite, noticed strange preparations taking place at Maimie's new house across the road.

He knew what they betided, but he tried hard not to think about them; he tried to shirk his own unhappy scruples about the part he was playing in that strange tragedy. At last one morning came when an unusual stir was visible betimes at Maimie's home; and then Sydney felt sure in his own heart that Maimie and Adrian were going to be married. His wife—his darling—was going to be married!

He had not the heart to watch himself supplanted, or to learn the truth for very certain; so he turned with an aching head to his desk, resolutely avoiding the window toward the Crescent, and wrote in sheer desperation of soul a long review of a silly novel.

Next morning, however, he could not help discovering by several signs that Maimie had gone away for a short trip; and when she returned in another month, it was abundantly clear that the house opposite had got a new master.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE WORLD SITS IN JUDGMENT.

If it had been anybody else but Maimie, all the world would have been surprised and horrified. Gossips would have gone about from drawing-room to drawing-room, hinting unuttered scandal and innuendo about that shocking—shocking precipitate marriage. Her poor dear husband only dead for just six months—and such a dreadful death, too, you know—shot himself, my dear; positively shot himself in his own house, because he couldn't succeed in some absurd chemical experiment or other he was trying in his laboratory. At least, so they said; all hushed up in public; not a word anywhere about his wife's conduct or the life they used to lead together. And now she goes, you see—a gay young widow with a fortune of her own—and, before half a year's over, marries this old Oxford flame of hers, who has been *most* assiduous in his attentions, indeed, ever since poor Mr. Chevenix's death, they tell me. For my part, my dear, my own opinion in the matter is——and so

forth, and so forth, *ad infinitum*, with the usual charity of the immaculate middle-aged British matron—the charity that thinketh all evil.

But as it was only Maimie—bright, innocent, baby-faced, soft-eyed little Maimie, with her widow's cap and her deep crape, and her shrinking, childish, confiding manner, that disarmed criticism, and charmed by its friendly *naïveté* even the immaculate middle-aged matron herself—why, as it was only Maimie, everybody said and thought it was really the most reasonable and sensible thing she could possibly do, under the circumstances. That sweet little Mrs. Chevenix, you know; she felt it so terribly, and was so alone in the world! Her father—a naval captain, very well connected somewhere down in Wales, I believe—drowned, you remember, out yachting, under her very eyes, shortly before her marriage; and then, when she'd hardly been settled in her new home quite a year, that great surly old bear of a husband of hers (you recollect him—the man with the long hair who used to stand in a corner as if he were dazed, and never could take the slightest interest in anything on earth except dynamite), well, he must go and blow his own brains out, it seems, out of mere pique, because he couldn't invent some horrid explosive he was always trying to copy from a Russian Nihilist, and leave his poor, dear, heart-broken little wife—a sweet creature—absolutely without a friend in the world. The dear child! she was terribly cut up about it; shattered, I assure you—quite shattered; positively mutilated; for a time, I was really afraid the shock was going to deprive her entirely of her reason. But she bore up bravely—she's as brave as she's sweet, dear soul! brave as a lion, you know! a granddaughter of one of Nelson's heroes—and we all did our very best to take care of her. Fortunately, the wretched man left her most comfortably provided for—which is always something—and she went away to the seaside, and tried to forget the blow, or rather to deaden it, as well as she was able. And now, that delightful Mr. Cipriani, the R.A., who's an old friend of hers—he painted her, you recollect, as Lucrezia Borgia, or some other of those fashionable Renaissance ladies, in that lovely thing of his

in the last Academy—Mr. Cipriani has very wisely persuaded her to yield to her natural inclination, and overcome her natural scruples, and marry that charming, handsome, gentlemanly Mr. Pym, whom we met, you remember, dear, at the Fergusons' garden-party, down at Surbiton. Poor dear little Mrs. Chevenix was dreadfully averse at first to anything of the sort—she's such a sweet, timid, blushing little creature, in spite of her bravery—and was all for waiting at least two years for him. But Mr. Cipriani most properly insisted that for a *very* young and attractive widow like herself—she's quite a child yet, you know—it would be wiser in every way to marry at once, and not let a long engagement drag on foolishly all for nothing, especially as she had no relations of her own of any sort to go to. Everybody quite approves of the arrangement, I assure you. You see, this Mr. Pym had been devotedly attached to her, before the horrid Chevenix man ever proposed; but being a perfect gentleman, with such nice honourable feelings, he withdrew at once from the implied attachment as soon as Mr. Chevenix began to pay her marked attentions, because he felt it would be quite wrong of him, as a much poorer man, to stand in the way of her worldly advancement. *So* nice of him, wasn't it, now, really? However, all's well that ends well; and as it turns out, the dear child's free at last to marry him—a most suitable match from every point of view; so that, after all, it's better as it is; for of course that horrid, dull, stupid Chevenix man was totally unfitted for a girl like her—a perfect stick, a mere dummy—and would have hung like a millstone round her neck as long as he'd lived, if he hadn't fortunately gone and shot himself and so released her. It was a *mariage de convenance*, the first one, of course—that's the simple truth of it; dear Mrs. Cipriani arranged it all beforehand, just to provide for the poor girl; but this, I understand, is quite an affair of affection on both sides; for Mr. Pym was desperately in love with her, and she with him, when they hadn't got a penny between them to bless themselves with.

And Adrian and Maimie were happy together; passionately happy, in spite of everything. If you think wrong-

doers are always miserable, pray in what universe have you been brought up? Shallow people, had they known the whole circumstances of the case, would have said two such wicked wretches as those two could never, by any possibility, be happy; they must have been stung by remorse, and chilled by disillusion, and goaded by distrust of one another. Such reasoners would only have been committing a very common psychological error; they would be reading their own average emotional nature into the wholly unlike and diverse characters of Adrian Pym and Maimie Llewellyn. Adrian, for his part, felt no remorse and no distrust; because remorse was beneath him, and because he understood Maimie too well to distrust her. Maimie, for her part, felt none either; because remorse was above her; she was too childish and too superficial to feel it, and because she profoundly loved and worshipped Adrian, and revelled in the joy of full possession of him. As they themselves had said, they were just suited for one another, and such people can truly love, as well as the best of us, though there may be nothing in either of them that seems at all lovable to other people differently constituted.

They did not hate one another, as conventional moralists would tell you they must have done, as soon as the first ardour of their passion had burnt itself out. On the contrary, they lived a life of quiet and profound affection, exactly like any two ordinary married people, with no such ghastly phantom at their backs to dog and terrify them. Adrian had always been Maimie's real choice, and if only she could have married him at the first outset, she would have settled down from the very beginning into a pretty, pleasant, captivating little matron, with no more exciting or tragic history than ninety-nine out of a hundred among the wives around her. Now that she was married to Adrian at last, the result was exactly the same in the long-run; everybody said, and said with truth, how sweet it was to see two married people so thoroughly and ideally suited to one another.

Besides, she had made a sacrifice for her present husband; she had given up the chance of becoming my lady; for Adrian, at least, would never be knighted. There is

nothing to ensure your loving anybody at all equal to making sacrifices for them.

And Sydney Chevenix, sitting ever with his opera-glasses unseen at the window opposite, could not help admitting to himself with a mixed sigh that Maimie seemed to be perfectly happy.

If only the truth could never leak out, no harm might come of it after all, except that his own life was sacrificed. And what is the sacrifice of one's own life to any one of us —even the smallest-souled—compared with a single woman's happiness?

To what heroic heights of self-devotion the worst among them can raise the very lowest of us!

CHAPTER XXXVI.

DANGER LOOMS.

As the months went round, and autumn came again, Sydney Chevenix found his money positively accumulating; he earned so much, working hard the livelong day to keep his mind occupied, that he didn't know in the end what on earth to do with his superfluous earnings. He had nothing to spend them on, except in watching over Maimie's happiness. So he took a second room, as a study he said, in a house round the corner, nearly opposite the Ciprianis'; for between the two he could help to watch over Maimie's life even better than from his solitary lonely place in Wilmington Crescent. Thence he dogged them in and out perpetually like a distant shadow, never attracting their attention at all by his sequacious habits, but keeping always close to Maimie and Adrian.

He liked Adrian—positively liked him in a strange, vicarious way; for did not Maimie love him passionately, and was he not obviously kind to darling Maimie? For that, Sydney could have forgiven him anything. Nay, more, he even recognised with a terrible remorseful aching in his poor torn heart, that Adrian made Maimie happier than he, Sydney, could ever have hoped to do. Though

Sydney would have died before admitting the fact, the lesser man came nearer to her level.

How little he had done to make Maimie happy in the old days! How often he had neglected her for the laboratory and the explosive! How seldom he had realized the needs and wants of a bright, sunny little angel like that! How absorbed he had been, for all his love of her, in his own pursuits and his own ideals! Ah, well, he would try to make up for it now! He would grudge nothing, so Maimie was happy.

Before Sydney had long had possession of his second room, he noticed at times a tall, pale woman with a dark shawl and a purple flower in her bonnet, often hanging about both houses, especially frequenting the neighbourhood of the Ciprianis' when Maimie and Adrian were calling on Hetty. He had observed the same woman many times before in Wilmington Crescent, passing up and down in front of his window in an aimless fashion; but there were so many people who regularly hung about the Crescent—from the dog's-meat man to the professional beggars—that Sydney thought nothing of the single circumstance. Now, however, that he had taken the room near Jocelyn's house, the coincidence of the woman's reappearance there, too, struck him so forcibly that he determined to keep a sharp eye upon her. Sitting one day with his opera-glass in his hand, close to the window, he observed the tall, pale stranger pass again, talking earnestly and eagerly this time to a man whom Vera Trotsky had long since pointed out to him as a well-known detective of the vulgarer order. His curiosity was at once excited, for the detective was an officer specially employed in looking after the group of dynamiters and anarchists who congregate in the alleys of Marylebone and Soho. He raised his opera-glass, and focussed it on the woman. Her features were somehow strangely familiar to him, and yet he couldn't, for the life of him, at first recover her personality.

Then, with a sudden flash of recollection, the face came back to him. It was Hannah Gowland's.

Hannah, too, must be watching Maimie. That much was evident. But watching her, why? What terrible suspicion

could the girl be harbouring? Did she know?—yes, yes—too true—he saw it now; she was there in the kitchen on that terrible evening. Sydney Chevenix's lips quivered with horror; and though it was broad daylight, and he seldom went out except at night (at least, when Maimie was at home), he determined to go down boldly into the street, and follow Hannah, to catch, if possible, some scraps of her mysterious conversation.

As he drew near her and saw her more distinctly, he was no longer surprised that he had failed at first fully to recognise his former servant. Hannah Gowland had changed terribly. The bright red spot in the centre of her cheek burnt deeper and fiercer and redder now than ever; the high cheek-bones stood out thin and prominent; the pale blanched lips showed utterly bloodless; and Sydney detected at once with his keen professional eye that the girl was lingering in the last fatal stage of a slow consumption. She spoke with difficulty in a low, faltering, laboured voice to the detective as she walked feebly along; and the detective listened to her, ear by lips, with evident attention. Sydney Chevenix thought to himself with a horrid glow of cruel satisfaction that if Hannah Gowland harboured any evil intent against his Maimie she hadn't a very long span of life left in which to wreak it.

He dogged them patiently, with a slow tread, till they had reached the Park, and taken their seats upon an open bench, backed by a shrubbery of aucubas and laurels. Then he walked past them unheeded a little way, and returned by the path on the other side, behind the laurels, where he could stand and catch unobserved himself some fragmentary snatches of their conversation. Hannah Gowland's voice was almost inaudible, but though the detective too spoke low and soft, Sydney Chevenix, with his quick ears, could catch distinctly nearly every word the man uttered.

'And what became afterwards of this fellow, Benyowski?' the detective was asking in an insinuating voice of Hannah Gowland, just as Sydney braced up his hearing to its utmost pitch to catch the scattered scraps of their whispered colloquy.

The answer sounded only on his ears like a faint murmur. Its words were separately quite indistinguishable.

'And that was the last you ever saw of him?' the man went on with a cheerful show of complete indifference.

Hannah Gowland evidently answered in the affirmative.

'Well, well, keep your eyes open,' the detective continued, 'wherever you go, and try to run down this man Benyowski. *I* can't find him. I don't understand it. I've been told by parties that know him well he's grown a beard and moustache since I dodged him last; and you must make allowance for that, of course, if you go a-looking for him. A beard and moustache will sometimes make no end of a difference to these close-shavers. But for all that, *I* can't find him. He pretends to be in London, I know, and he writes for the papers; but at the offices where he sends his things they never see him, and they don't know where he lives, even; for I've watched the addresses they've give me, and can't never catch sight of him—no, nor of nobody like him neither. There's another man gets his letters—a tall fellow with a black beard, but Benyowski himself is not producible. As the lawyers says, "non est invented." Them communist fellows are terrible cards for hiding and skulking. I'd sooner run in half-a-dozen ordinary thieves and vagabonds any day than one blooming communist.'

Hannah Gowland asked something in a tremulous voice, which Sydney could hear was broken with anxiety.

'Well, I don't mind telling you,' the detective said with an expansive burst, 'though it *is* against orders. The rule is to ask questions, but to give no answers. However, you're on the scent yourself, and you're game to help us. There's a reward going to be offered. He's wanted in connection with a murder, that's all—nothing more, ma'am.'

'A murder!' Hannah Gowland cried aghast, so comparatively loud and clear this time that Sydney could distinctly overhear every word she uttered. 'A murder, Mr. Curnock! Oh no, don't go and say it was a murder! She never murdered him! She never meant it! She never did! It wasn't a murder!'

The dectective whistled a long low 'whew.' Then he paused and reflected a moment.

'*She?*' he said, in a very quiet suggestive voice. 'Who's *she*, I'd like to know, miss? I haven't heard nothing about any *she* in the matter. It strikes me, if it comes to that, young woman, that you've got more to tell about this here dynamiting case than you care to let on to me, and that's my candid opinion. We don't know nothing about any *she*. A he's the fox this time. It's Benyowski himself *we* put it all down to.'

'What? what?' Hannah Gowland cried. 'Put all what down to? Mr. Chevenix's——'

'Mr. Chevenix's how much?' the detective asked quickly.

With a sudden change of voice Hannah Gowland continued, 'Mr. Chevenix's assistant.'

'No, no,' the detective answered in a knowing tone. 'You weren't a-going to say that, you know. You were going to say, "Mr. Chevenix's MURDER." We all know very well Benyowski was this party Chevenix's assistant. That's neither here nor there, I take it, and ain't got anything to do with the point at issue. Don't you go and pretend not to understand. You're a sharp one, you are; but I'm one too deep for you, young woman. Chevenix, it's well beknown, went and shot himself in his own laboratory, leaving a letter behind on the table to say he done it. There ain't nothing in all that to criminate Benyowski. You're trying to seem too innocent in this business; but it don't do—it don't deceive me. You know as well as I do myself, ma'am, that what we want this fellow Benyowski for is not Chevenix's affair at all, but just that little matter of the Guildford murder. You'd better tell me the truth outright, and save your own bacon anyway.'

'Indeed, indeed,' Hannah Gowland protested in a low voice, so faintly that only Sydney Chevenix's intense interest could enable him to catch the words as she uttered them,' I didn't know that was what you wanted him for. I thought you suspected——'

'Suspected what?'

'That somebody had . . . shot . . . Mr. Chevenix.'

For a moment Sydney waited in breathless suspense. Would the detective with professional acuteness follow up the clue so plausibly suggested to him? If so, it might indeed be a terrible thing for poor Maimie. The pause seemed endless—a brief eternity of suffering. Next instant the man's answer came short and sharp.

'Pooh! pooh! That was all straight and even, my girl; don't you fear nothing about that. Chevenix shot himself and confessed he'd a done it. Coroner's jury found it tempor'y insanity. The thing we want this man Benyowski for ain't that; it's the murder of a Russian fellow down at Guildford.'

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE STORM GATHERS.

SYDNEY CHEVENIX went home that night doubly relieved. The detective did not suspect Maimie; and whatever Hannah Gowland might fear or imagine, it was clear, first, that she half believed Benyowski had fired the shot that wounded him; and, second, that she was on Maimie's side rather than against her. It was appalling to think anybody suspected anything in the matter; but perhaps, happily, this Guildford mystery (of which he knew nothing) might help to distract the attention of everybody concerned from the Beaumont Terrace business till it was all fairly passed away and forgotten.

And then a curious idea suddenly struck him, an idea which he had wholly overlooked before, so absorbed was he in his hopes and fears for Maimie's safety, so forgetful of himself and his own dangers or personal difficulties. Stanislas Benyowski was wanted, it seemed, for a murder at Guildford. Nothing more likely: Stanislas Benyowski was sure to have blown up some treacherous fellow-Nihilist or other. Sydney knew from all he had seen at Vera Trotsky's, as well as from all Benyowski himself had told him, that the refugees were by no means puritans in the matter of what they called political executions. No doubt Benyowski had really killed some Russian at Guildford, exactly as he

himself had been afterwards killed in turn by some unknown Nihilist. But if so—and this was really serious—then he himself was now Benyowski, and therefore by clear implication a murderer. In taking upon himself Benyowski's personality, he had also taken upon himself the responsibility for all Benyowski's past actions.

Yes, this was really serious. Not of course because if they find you guilty of a murder, they take you and hang you by the neck till dead—Sydney Chevenix hardly ever reflected to himself upon that purely personal and incidental disadvantage of the situation—but because if he were once arrested and tried as Benyowski there would be a great danger of his being confronted with witnesses, many of whom might possibly fail or refuse to identify him; and then the whole truth would perhaps ooze out, and there would be an end of Maimie's happiness. In itself, to be sure, being hanged as Benyowski would no doubt prove a very good way out of the false position: after a man is once duly hanged, nobody ever begins to suspect his identity with another person already comfortably dead and buried. With Sydney Chevenix lying snug and silent in Woking cemetery, and Stanislas Benyowski satisfactorily hanged out of the way for murder, Maimie's life might be considered absolutely secure from further trouble. Only the great difficulty stared him full in the face, *would* they hang him for Stanislas Benyowski? But no—even to attempt such a plot as that would be too risky. If the thing depended only on Vera Trotsky and the other Nihilists, to be sure, he could confidently count upon their swearing to anything and everything he wished them to swear to, especially as it would suit their own purpose to have him put out of the way legally. His identification with Benyowski was an integral part of their own programme; it was absolutely essential to their own safety. But there were others to reckon with besides the Nihilists—the detective, and the police, and the world generally. In order that he should continue to pass for Benyowski, it was imperatively necessary that he should never be confronted with anybody who knew anything about the real owner of the name he bore, except Vera Trotsky and the

other Nihilists. Even supposing he were not at once recognised as himself, Sydney Chevenix, yet if ever a passing doubt were raised as to his perfect identity with the dead man whose personality he had usurped, some sort of inquiry would surely be set on foot, and it would be all up with Maimie's secret.

To avoid his own arrest as Benyowski was therefore a matter of the first importance.

How absurd if the police were to follow up Hannah Gowland's obscure hint, and arrest him as Benyowski for his own murder!

While Sydney Chevenix was thinking over these things by himself in his own room, and trembling at this new and double menace against Maimie's safety, the detective for his part was reporting to a superior at Scotland Yard the result of his interview with Hannah Gowland.

'So you couldn't get anything further out of this woman, Curnock?' the superintendent said, when the man had finished his short story.

'Not a word, sir; not a shadow; not a hint of any sort. Except that that I told you, that she slipped out so sudden and unawares like, about there being a woman in the case somewhere. However, I don't attach no importance at all to that. The day Komissaroff was drownded, as I well know, nobody went with him to the waterside except Benyowski. That's clear from what all the Guildford boathouse people gives in evidence when I went down to inquire about it. There was a woman at the bottom of it all, of course—that there Madamazell Trotsky as they call her; she's mostly at the bottom of all this here devilry, I take it. She was at the bottom of Benyowski himself getting wounded, I don't deny it. Only you can't never catch her. She's too smart for that: she never does anything except through her people. It's Benyowski himself as give Komissaroff the loaded cigar; nobody but him went down to the boats with him. And it's Benyowski we've got to catch, and try, and swing for it.'

'It's very fortunate,' the superintendent murmured reflectively, 'that we happened to dredge up that end of

cigar stuck into the mouth. If he hadn't been smoking it, so, in a holder, and if the holder hadn't been driven right through the palate the way it was, we shouldn't have had anything tangible to go upon to show it was anything more than an ordinary boating accident. Of course, the circumstances would have been very suspicious—very suspicious; but there'd have been nothing really damaging or convincing to go to a jury.'

'Got the analyst's report upon the end of the cigar yet, sir?' the man Curnock asked curiously. 'Any trace of dynamite, now, about it?'

'Well, no. It isn't that. The Professor says there wasn't any dynamite. Some other explosive that he can't determine. But an explosive, he's sure, from the nature of the jagged edge of the cigar: there's his report upon it. Something new in the way of an invention, he seems to fancy; some fresh nitrogen-compound, no doubt, from that man Chevenix's private laboratory—the fellow who was so much mixed up with Benyowski, you know, and who shot himself because his last experiments all turned out such fearful failures. Oh yes, it was his house, of course'—turning over some papers—'that this woman Gowland was actually living in when she first came in contact with our man Benyowski.'

'It was his house,' Curnock answered, nodding.

'It's very odd,' the Superintendent went on, still glancing at the papers, 'that you who know Benyowski by sight so well, and who are accustomed to every sort of disguise a human being can possibly adopt, shouldn't be able to track him down—a man whom we know to be now in London, who actually contributes under his own name to respectable newspapers, who still goes regularly to Mdlle. Trotsky's, and who apparently makes no sort of effectual attempt in any way to conceal or hide himself. I can't understand it. I can't fathom it. In the whole course of my professional experience, Curnock, I never remember any case like it. We're baffled, baffled—utterly baffled. It's a disgrace to the department, I say; a disgrace to the department.'

'They're such slippery people to deal with, that's where it is,' Curnock replied apologetically, twisting his finger

up and down before him in graphic imitation of the track of a serpent. 'They play such a blooming lot of tricks upon you all together, and back one another up so, and deceive you time and again that cunning, and make such regular game of the executive and the force all along, you see, sir. A dozen's the times I've been taken somewhere or other of a wet night to see Benyowski—he don't never come out at all hardly by daylight; and every time, whenever I got there, it wasn't Benyowski a bit they showed me, but some other fellow not the least like him—a big black-bearded man with a totally different sort of features. Benyowski's about; that's certain. He was discharged from hospital with the bullet-wound cured, or, at least, he takes himself away as soon as ever his legs 'll carry him, and he goes straight off back to Madamazell Trotsky's, and he's been seen and spoken to since by plenty I know of, nurses and others; but *I* can't never get a sight of him somehow, bless you. It's most singular, most unaccountable.'

And he nodded his head like a nonplused official.

'It's curious, too,' the superintendent went on in a meditative tone, 'that after these people tried to murder him he should go back to them as if nothing at all unusual had happened, and fraternize freely, and be on such friendly terms with them again the same as ever. I can't understand it. It's extremely perplexing.'

'Oh, that's all right enough, you bet,' Curnock answered, smiling, 'as soon as you know as much about the habits and manners of the animals as I do, sir. They don't think nothing of a shoot, Lord bless your heart, they don't!—that's only done in the way of playfulness. Kind of a warning like, as much as to say, "Just you mind how you behave yourself in future, and don't you go a-talking imprudent about us on no account to nobody." He's as thick as thieves with them now, anyway; and they're all every bit as anxious as he is to keep him out o' the way, comfortable, and prevent us all from getting so much as a stray look at him.'

'Well,' the superintendent said wearily, 'you must keep a sharp look-out, that's all, Curnock; and if he's in London, as you say you're sure he is, sooner or later you must knock up against him somewhere or other, for certain.'

'If I don't,' the detective answered with brisk confidence, 'why then my name ain't Samuel Percy Curnock, Constable of the Criminal Investigation Department. That's just about the long and the short of it.'

On the Thursday after, Vera Trotsky called in unexpectedly at Sydney's lodgings.

'My friend,' she said, after a hurried greeting, 'you must be very cautious. The mouchards are looking out for Stanislas Benyowski. We have put them off the scent, but not for long. If you don't avoid them you will be taken up. There's a warrant out for you—that is to say, at least, for Benyowski.'

'I know it,' Sydney answered with a sinking heart. 'My poor little wife! The net seems somehow to be closing tighter and tighter around her. If ever it's discovered that I am not really Stanislas Benyowski, all will be up with her. It's too terrible.'

Vera Trotsky looked at him with tears in her eyes.

'Always her,' she said softly. 'Never yourself, my friend. And she threw you away. How could she ever do it? With such a man as you to help and strengthen her, what might not any woman in this sad world hope to rise to!'

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE STORM BREAKS.

One dull morning, a few weeks later, Hetty Cipriani was sitting alone by the drawing-room fire, while Jocelyn worked hard as usual at his new Academy picture of Balder Dead in the studio behind, when the servant entered with a twisted note, written on a rather dirty scrap of blue paper, and folded irregularly by fingers evidently quite unaccustomed to the polite and learned art of letter-writing. Hetty took the shabby little missive mechanically from the old massive silver waiter, and glanced at the handwriting on the outside without much pretence or show of interest. The note was written in pencil in a large, round, shaky, uneducated hand; and Hetty started a little to herself

when she saw its contents ran after this very strange and unexpected fashion :

'DEAR MADAM,

'Will you come round and see me before I die has I has something about Mrs. Chevenix that is to say Mrs. Pym waying upon my conshense which I cant tell to a clergiman or any body only to you. For Gods sake dont negleck this has I cannot die without confessing it. Show this letter to nobody not even your husband from your obedient servant

'HANNAH GOWLAND.'

Hetty felt her face flush suddenly crimson as she looked up from perusing this extraordinary communication.

'It isn't dated,' she said in haste to the housemaid, trembling with surprise from head to foot. 'The girl doesn't say where she's living or where I'm to go to. Who brought it? Is the messenger waiting? Run quick and tell her not to go till she lets me know where the woman is who told her to bring it.'

'The young person is waiting in the hall, if you please, ma'am,' the housemaid answered demurely. 'I told her to take a seat till you saw whether an answer was required or not, ma'am.'

Hetty rushed impulsively out into the passage.

'Who sent you?' she cried eagerly to the girl. 'Where is she? What does she want me for? Do you know anything about this Hannah Gowland?'

'If you please, ma'am, the girl in the hall answered, rising and curtseying timidly, 'Hannah's my sister, and it's her as used to be cook a year ago at Mrs. Chevenix's that was, in Beaumont Terrace—the same that's now Mrs. Pym, if you please, ma'am: and Hannah, she's at the Regent's Park Hospital, and she's dying of the consumption, ma'am, and she's got something dreadful on her mind that she can't tell to nobody but you; and she can't die in peace until she's told you.'

Hetty was pale as death now. She couldn't imagine what on earth could be the matter; but she knew it was

something dreadful about Maimie; and in spite of everything, Maimie, with her wonderful power of winning hearts, had made Hetty Cipriani love her dearly, as soon as that little episode with Jocelyn was fairly dead and buried in forgetfulness. What on earth could this dimly remembered servant of the Chevenix household have to tell her about dear Maimie? It must be something very alarming: if not, it couldn't weigh so heavily at such a moment on the soul and conscience of a dying woman.

'Jocelyn, Jocelyn,' she cried in a tone of unspeakable alarm, bursting into the studio to the complete confusion of the fair-haired model girl sitting for the figure, for a Scandinavian goddess, 'look a moment, will you, at this letter! A girl's just brought it from the Regent's Park Hospital; and she says the person who wrote it is her sister, and she wants to see me at once because she's dying.'

Jocelyn took the dirty scrap of paper carelessly, and glanced though it in haste with a nonchalant expression, which deepened as he read into a sudden flush of vivid crimson. Then he crumpled it up tight in his hard-pressed hand, and flung it angrily into the studio fireplace.

'If I were you, Hetty,' he answered after a moment's pause, in reply to his wife's mutely appealing look, 'I wouldn't go to see her: I'd take no notice of it. Whatever the secret she's got may be, it's better a thousand times it should die with her than that anybody else should know a word about it. Why should you want to burden your own heart with it? Why should you want to hear any foolish confidences she may have to make to you against our sweet Maimie?'

'But Jocelyn, Jocelyn!' Hetty cried imploringly—'a dying woman, darling!—a dying woman!'

Jocelyn pulled his beard with meditative deliberateness.

'Poor creature,' he said in his soft clear voice, unmoved to pity; 'I'm sorry for her, Hetty, extremely sorry for her. The weakness of women is very depressing. The coneys are indeed a feeble folk. They can never keep their own counsel. But you mustn't go, darling. She must die unshrived by herself for all that. What does she want to put you against poor little Maimie for now, I wonder? If

you take my advice, you won't go, Hetty. Nothing but harm can possibly come of it. Suspicion, at any rate: perhaps dislike, anger, positive estrangement. The world is not too full of friends, you know, sweetheart. We can't afford to lose our one little Maimie.'

'But, darling, must the woman die with this thing unconfessed and rankling in her conscience?'

Jocelyn stroked his Vandyke beard once more with nervously twitching fingers.

'She's probably making a mountain out of a molehill, Hetty,' he answered at last, evasively.

'But for Maimie's sake, Jocelyn: for Maimie's sake! Surely for her sake I ought to go and hear it! Consider, darling; if this woman doesn't tell me—if I don't go and listen to her story—she'll probably tell somebody else: a clergyman or somebody—you see she talks in her note about a clergyman: and if she really knows something or other against dear Maimie——'

Jocelyn started. It was a start of sudden recognition. Then he waited and gazed at her silently, while one might count a hundred. At last he opened his mouth slowly.

'You . . . had . . . better . . . go . . . Hetty,' he whispered in a soft voice, with a cautious side glance towards the too suspiciously attentive model: 'you had better go, darling, now I come to think about it; but prepare yourself for the worst: you may have to hear something that will shock you terribly. The world isn't all made up of women like you, my little guileless pure-hearted wifie. There are things done in it—and by those we all love dearly, too—that would make your sweet innocent blood run cold within you if only you knew all about them, Hetty. . . . Prepare yourself for the worst. You will have need of preparation. This may mean a terrible crisis. But for Maimie's sake, as you say, you certainly ought to go and see her. You are wiser than I, sweetheart; you are wiser than I. You women jump at things always so much quicker than we men do. You saw at once the weak point of the policy of abstention. . . . Fräulein'—to the fair-haired model, in German—'I shall not need your services any longer to-day. Excuse my dismissing you. I go out with my wife on

unexpected business. Wait a minute for me, Hetty darling. Run up and put on your jacket at once, there's a good girl, while I wash this paint and stuff here off my fingers. I'll walk round with you as far as the hospital, and wait for you below while you go up and see this dying woman. (Confound her! what does she want to go and die for now, and rake up charges on her death-bed like a fool against poor little Maimie? Couldn't she go and die quietly somewhere on her own account, or live and hold her tongue like other sensible, reasonable people?) You'll need my arm when you come out, perhaps, darling. Nerve yourself up for the worst, and be prepared to hear something terrible.'

'Oh, Jocelyn, do you know something terrible against Maimie, then, yourself already, that you talk so dreadfully?'

'I know nothing, Hetty,' Jocelyn answered, soothing her quietly; 'absolutely nothing: so far as I can tell, there may be nothing to know. But I know the field of the possible is always infinite, and I'm ready to believe anything about anybody — except you, darling.' And he kissed her tenderly, a soft light kiss upon her pale, white, anxious knitted forehead.

Hetty turned away trembling, and went upstairs with uncertain knees to put her jacket on. As she did so, Jocelyn slipped quietly off to the dining-room sideboard and filled a little pocket flask to the neck with old brandy.

'She may need it before she gets back,' he said to himself with a gentle smile. 'Dear little Hetty! It will all come out now, and shock her inexpressibly! This is a bad job, indeed, for poor Maimie. Why the dickens couldn't this wretched, unfortunate Gowland woman, if she knows the secret and has kept it so long, keep it still a little longer. Just ready to die, and she needs must die with Maimie's condemnation on her dying lips! . . . This base fear of death! this miserable craven crouching and cowering before the bare prospect of a physical dissolution!— what a vile thing it is! How I despise it! how I hate it! In her slavish terror about her own soul, her own poor sordid scullery-maid's soul, that abject creature will go and wreck the whole happiness and the very life of our dear, bright,

beautiful little Maimie! The miserable coward! I've no pity for her. I haven't got such a thing as a soul at all myself, thank goodness; but if I had twenty of them, all as dear to me as that wretched woman's is to her this morning, I'd gladly give them all a thousand times over to eternal perdition to save a moment's trouble to Hetty or to Maimie. But these people are utterly craven—selfish and craven, the whole cringing lot of them. They stand aghast at the hell they have conjured up for themselves out of their own fancy, and would sacrifice all the world beside to keep their own precious squalid little souls from going down quick into it a minute earlier.'

When Hetty rejoined him, he had his coat and hat ready, and they walked round hurriedly together to the Regent's Park Hospital in utter silence. There Jocelyn Cipriani waited below in a little anteroom, while Hetty went upstairs in fear and trembling to see the sender of the strange letter. Profound forebodings seized on the painter's soul as he sat there idly, twirling his moustache and inspecting the bare ceiling, in dire expectation of the result of the visit. The last time he had sat in that blank little room was on the evening . . . well, on the evening of the murder, when he came there alone, in doubt and hesitation, to ask whether Sydney Chevenix's condition was improving or otherwise. Jocelyn Cipriani was by no means a superstitious man; but the omen certainly did not seem a particularly lucky one.

Meanwhile, Hetty had mounted alone the long white stairs, and been duly ushered by the attendant sister to Hannah Gowland's sick bedside.

'The woman can't live out the week,' a nurse whispered low in reply to Hetty's inquiring glance: 'she seems to have got something on her mind, very particular, and as she wouldn't tell it to anybody but you, ma'am, the house-surgeon said we might send her sister round to fetch you.'

Hetty approached the bed, trembling irresistibly. A pale thin woman lay breathing hard and thick upon the propped-up pillows, with a deep red spot, burning bright as fire, in the very centre of her white cheek, and a feeble light flashing fitfully in her great, sunken, black-ringed eyeballs. At sight of her pitiable condition Hetty's womanly heart

melted instantly, and she forgot at once her terrors and her misgivings in the presence of that pale-faced dying woman.

'You wanted to see me, didn't you, Hannah?' she said in her gentlest and most sympathetic tones, as she bent over the bedside. 'You have something troubling you that you want to tell me. Let me know what it is, dear, and I'll try to help you as far as I'm able; though, my poor girl, my poor dear child, I'm afraid it's very little indeed that such a one as I can possibly do for you.'

The woman clutched the sleeve of Hetty's jacket hard in five pallid long fingers, and drew her face down closer to the pillow with the wild energy of a last convulsive dying flicker.

'Come nearer,' she whispered in a hoarse undertone, half choked by the evident tightness of her breathing, 'come nearer, Mrs. Cipriani. I know you. I knew you'd come. I knew you were a friend of hers. If you don't hold your head quite close down here by my ear, they'll all overhear what it is I'm saying to you; and then she'll be hanged, the angel, the darling, the beautiful pet, the sweet little innocent! Come nearer!—come nearer!'

For a moment Hetty imagined the woman must be wandering in her mind with fever, and speaking with the mere random force of wild delirium; but Hannah read at once in her eye the unspoken thought, and only clutched her all the tighter, pulling her down till lips and ear almost met, and whispering yet lower and hoarser than ever to her frightened listener:

'I'm not beside myself,' she murmured heavily. 'I'm not raving, Mrs. Cipriani. I'm as sane as you are—quite clear and collected like. But I couldn't die with the secret on my soul, and I couldn't tell it to any other living creature except you, and ruin my darling; so I couldn't rest until I'd sent for you. You won't tell upon her? You won't let them know about it? You'll keep it locked up in your own heart as long as you live, just as I've done; and when it kills you, as it's killed me—burning and heaving so within me, like—you'll confess it all to somebody else you can trust to keep it, and not die with the weight of it burdening your soul in the very churchyard!'

A vague, indefinable horror seized on Hetty, as the woman looked at her with her big, hollow, yearning eyes—hungry eyes that seemed to be positively consumed and devoured by the terrible secret they had kept so earnestly—and she strove half against her will to break from the fierce clutch of those skinny fingers; but Hannah Gowland held her still tighter and tighter, and muttered in deep tones, close to her face:

'You won't betray her! You won't inform upon her! You'll keep the secret the same as I have done!'

'Inform upon whom?' Hetty answered, pretending not to know of what she was speaking. 'Whose secret is it you want to tell me?'

'Hers!' the dying woman answered eagerly, looking back into Hetty's half-averted eyes with terrible earnestness; 'hers! My sweetheart's; my darling's; my angel's. You know who I'm talking about as well as I do. Mrs. Chevenix's, the darling, the angel, the sweetheart, the innocent lamb. God bless her!'

Hetty's blood ran chilly within her.

'And what is it you have to say about her?' she managed at last to gasp out feebly.

'You'll not betray her? You'll not use it against her? Oh, for Heaven's sake, say you'll never desert her! Promise me on my dying bed, Mrs. Cipriani, you won't ever tell a single living soul about it!'

'I promise,' Hetty answered slowly, with a shudder.

'Swear it by the throne of God Almighty,' the woman persisted anxiously, with the hungry eyes fixed full upon her. 'Swear that you'll never say a word of it as long as you live to her or to no man.'

'I can't swear,' Hetty answered, tremulously, drawing back a little.

'You shall,' the woman cried, clutching her arm with all her bony fingers deep imprinted, and pulling her down again till their faces actually touched one another. 'You must; you're bound to. If you don't, I'll choke you! Swear, I tell you: swear to me by God, as I'm a dying woman.'

'I swear,' Hetty murmured in a very low tone, compelled,

as it were, to that unwonted phrase by the woman's fierce magnetic energy.

Hannah Gowland smiled feebly and relaxed her hold a little for a single moment. She felt she had triumphed, and the triumph rendered her quite inarticulate for the time, till she could catch her breath again, after the terrible effort. Presently she went on, low and hoarse once more.

'I'll tell you what it is, then, Mrs. Cipriani. The night poor Mr. Sydney Chevenix was murdered——'

Hetty started.

'Murdered!' she cried aloud. 'Murdered, did you say then? Murdered! How terrible! But Mr. Chevenix wasn't murdered. He shot himself in his own laboratory, and left a letter behind to say he'd done it.'

The woman let her head drop back from its constrained and straining attitude flat upon the pillow, and shut her lank-jawed mouth with hectic firmness.

'If you're going to let the whole hospital overhear what it is we two are talking about,' she whispered doggedly, after a short interval, 'I won't say another word to you or to any living soul on earth about it. I'll go down unconfessed into my grave with the sin of murder clinging like the winding-sheet in the coffin around me.'

Hetty's heart beat violently.

'Oh, go on!' she cried, with a look of horror at this awful foreboding. 'Tell me all about it! I'll be very quiet. Don't die with this terrible, terrible secret weighing so heavily on your poor conscience.'

'On the night when poor Mr. Chevenix was murdered,' the woman began again, in the same set voice, as if she were repeating a familiar formula, 'Lucy and me—Lucy was the housemaid—was sitting in the kitchen close by the door of the passage that led into the laboratory. Stainislas Benyowski—he was the assistant—he came from the laboratory that evening early, and then he went out and did not come back again. After that Mr. Cipriani and a friend called in, but they didn't stop long, and they soon went off too. Bime-by Mrs. Chevenix—God bless her, I wouldn't hurt a hair of her head—the innocent darling—she came in, and began laughing and talking as usual—she was always such a one for laughing—

with Mr. Sydney. Presently I heard she'd left off laughing, and as well as I could make out, she seemed to me to be crying dreadfully. But I didn't say nothing at the time to Lucy about it, because I didn't want her to know Mrs. Chevenix had got herself into any trouble. Soon after that the door opened again, and Mr. Chevenix, he came out, as white as a sheet, with his handkerchief pressed over the bosom of his ulster, and walked, tottering-like, right up the passage ; and Mrs. Chevenix, she was in the room then ; I could see her quite distinct in her dress and bonnet, but Lucy couldn't, for I was sitting so as I looked out through the crack of the kitchen door, and saw into the laboratory. And there was blood, too, blood in great swimming pools lying all over the floor of the room there. If Mr. Chevenix shot himself, Mrs. Chevenix was in there with him when he did it ; and that never came out at the inquest, because I was the only one that knew, and I didn't say a word about it when I gave my evidence. But Mr. Chevenix *didn't* shoot himself, and that I know myself for certain ; for I swear before God I overheard just one word she said to him a minute before as she sat in the laboratory,—"Sydney, Sydney, I knew I was shooting you ! I did it intentionally ! I meant to shoot you !"'

Hetty's face blanched with horror, and she clung for support to the iron bedpost, but she didn't flinch in a single muscle of her face as Hannah Gowland reached this awful climax of her terrible story. She only looked upon the woman and prayed inaudibly, with muttering lips, 'Have mercy upon her ! have mercy upon her !' As to Hannah Gowland herself, worn out with the effort of so long a speech, wrung slowly from her throat between the gasps, sentence by sentence, she sank back once more exhausted upon the pillow, and whispering hoarsely, 'My side ! my side !' seemed incapable for a second of speaking further.

They faced each other there in silence for many long minutes, those two pale women, Hannah Gowland scowling painfully in fear and remorse for poor Maimie, and Hetty Cipriani murmuring still with blanched lips her inarticulate prayer to pitying Heaven ; and then at last Hetty broke the awful stillness with a searching question, 'If you knew all

this was true, my poor woman, why did you never say a word to anybody about it till this very minute?'

'Why?' the woman cried, lifting herself half up in bed with fearful earnestness, and peering at Hetty from her bloodshot eyes like a haggard maniac: 'Why? do you ask me? why, indeed, says she! I'll tell you why, then? Because I loved her! Yes, I loved her! She never cared for me no more than to know that I was the cook in her kitchen. But I loved her—I loved her with all my heart and soul, like everybody else that ever came across her. She has the loving eye to cast over one, somehow, as witches have the evil eye to bewitch one. I loved her, and I love her still, and I'd always love her, if she was twenty times a miserable murderess. I love her with all my heart and soul; and when I was sent away from her I never came back to see her again, because the secret was burning into my heart, and I was afraid she'd notice me and find it out, and know she was discovered—the darling, the angel. It's burned into me, and burned me out, and that's why I'm lying here now, Mrs. Cipriani. It's for her sake—for Mrs. Chevenix's sake—for Maimie's sake—in my own heart, though she's a lady and I'm a servant, I always call her Maimie—everybody always calls her Maimie: and if I'd got to die a thousand times over for Maimie's sake I'd not be afraid of it—for Maimie, for Maimie!'

She shuddered terribly even as she spoke, and the fiery red spot in the centre of her cheek grew redder and fiercer every minute. Hetty looked at her, now speechless with terror, incapable of thinking even of Maimie, and wholly absorbed in contemplation of the dying woman's unutterable energy.

Hannah Gowland in return looked up at her suspiciously from her deep eyes once more.

'You won't tell on her?' she cried piteously, pressing her pale fingers deeper and deeper than ever into the bare flesh of Hetty's arm above the wrist. 'You won't tell on her! You won't let them hurt a hair of my darling's head, my angel, my perfect one, my beloved, my sweetheart. She might kill him, if she would. Who could forbid her? Would they hang her for that—with a rope round her

sweet neck, the angel, the innocent? He was her husband: she might have killed me a hundred times over, and willing too, that was only her kitchen-maid. Swear to me you won't tell on her. Swear it again, swear it this minute; swear to me by the throne of God in heaven that you'll never——'

A hideous gurgle choked the rest. Hetty, looking down at the woman in unspeakable alarm, saw that her sheet and night-dress were covered with blood, and blood was spurting rapidly in sudden jets from her mouth and nostrils.

'Quick, quick,' she cried, to the hospital nurses. 'There's something the matter. She's dying!—she's dying! Look, look at the blood! Oh, what can be the matter, what can be the matter with her!'

The hospital nurse stole up cautiously on noiseless feet and looked at the awful sight with critical calmness.

'It's no use troubling yourself any more about her,' she said coolly, feeling the pulse with her hard fingers. 'The woman's dead already. She's burst a blood-vessel. She wasn't hanging to life by more than a thread, and the excitement's killed her. She's dead this minute. She wouldn't be satisfied until she saw you, and now this is the end of it. I told her how it 'd be. I'll go and get the house-surgeon at once to look at her right off, and certify the cause of death before there's any doubt about it.'

CHAPTER XXXIX.

HETTY THINKS FOR HERSELF.

SPEECHLESS and awe-struck, Hetty reeled and staggered down the hospital stairs, and groped her way blindly out into the little anteroom, where Jocelyn was waiting for her with bated breath. As she reached the door, her trembling knees fairly gave way beneath her, and she stumbled rather than sat down upon the rude rush-bottomed chair that Jocelyn hastily thrust beside her on her entrance into the anteroom. Her cheeks were white and ghost-like as death,

and her pallid lips scarcely moved in answer to Jocelyn's rapidly reiterated and eager inquiries. For a minute or two her husband thought she would have fainted outright; but the brandy which he poured out hurriedly into the little wicker cup on the flask he had brought with him, and forced down her throat half against her will, revived her consciousness somewhat after the first few minutes, and she sat there swaying herself up and down in deadly horror, but unable as yet to bring forth a syllable of the fearful scene she had just passed through.

'Well,' Jocelyn said at last, his own hands quivering and trembling violently with excitement as he held the wicker cup with difficulty to her lips, 'so the worst has come. The woman has confessed to you. And what did she tell you after all, darling? The miserable coward, what did she tell you, Hetty?'

'Oh, Jocelyn,' Hetty cried, hastily putting her white hand up in horror and deprecation to his bloodless lips. 'Don't talk so. Don't call her a coward. Don't say it, darling. The poor creature's dead! dead, dead, dead, this minute. She burst a blood-vessel before my very face—now—here—just as she was speaking to me.'

A sudden gleam of hope flashed unexpectedly from Jocelyn's eyes as he echoed excitedly:

'Dead! dead! dead this minute! Then did she die before she had time even to tell you what was this dreadful secret of hers, Hetty?'

'No,' Hetty answered, with a convulsive effort, 'she told me her secret, and it killed her—killed her, Jocelyn. She died just as she was making me swear I would never tell it as long as I lived to you or to anybody. The blood—oh the blood! Oh Jocelyn, darling, it broke from her mouth and face—such great spurts of it—oh, it was too horrible, too horrible! It makes me sick still even to think of it.'

Jocelyn laid his white hand upon her still whiter cheek, and tried to soothe her feebly with a gentle pressure.

'And she told you all,' he asked in a low voice, 'before she died, did she, Hetty?'

'Yes, Jocelyn dearest, she told me everything, everything, everything. And oh, my darling, you can't think

how terrible it was. It can't be true. It can't be possible. I can never, never believe it of Maimie.'

Jocelyn whistled to himself a long, low, doubtful, ominous whistle.

'She told you everything?' he repeated slowly in a nervous undertone. 'Confound the woman, why couldn't she die first? what right had she got to tell you everything? If she was going to die at all, why couldn't she have managed to die ten minutes earlier. And so she told you the whole truth, you say, Hetty?'

Hetty shrank back from him in evident alarm.

'The whole truth, Jocelyn,' she echoed in a bewildered whisper. 'Why, what on earth can you mean, darling? Did you know all about it before, yourself, then, and never say a single word to me of it?'

'Never, Hetty, never; I knew nothing. I know nothing now. I'm as ignorant as you are of it. I had a suspicion —a mere vague, floating, formless suspicion — baseless, baseless—absolutely baseless—about which it would have been wicked to say anything to anybody—even to you yourself, dear little wife.'

'What was it, Jocelyn? You *must* tell me!'

Jocelyn hesitated.

'Well, you know, Hetty,' he whispered fearfully at last, casting an anxious glance around him as he spoke, 'that letter that Sydney wrote the night he . . . killed himself . . . you remember—the letter to say he had committed suicide——'

'Well,' Hetty cried, breathless with anxiety. 'It . . . it wasn't a forgery, was it, Jocelyn?' And then a sudden horror coming over her whole soul with one wild flash of vivid suspicion she asked again in a terrified whisper, 'Oh, Jocelyn, surely it couldn't have been that Adrian Pym forged that letter, did he?'

In spite of the awful solemnity of the moment, Jocelyn Cipriani smiled his quiet philosophic smile in prompt acknowledgment of the curious felicity of that passing suspicion.

'No, Hetty darling,' he answered, smoothing her hand with his own confidingly. 'How quick you women are in

jumping at a conclusion. But you're wrong for all that. He didn't forge the letter. It wasn't a forgery at all, I'm certain. It was in Sydney Chevenix's own handwriting; of that I'm confident. But, Hetty, I believe it was written after the mur—— I mean, after Sydney had really shot himself. There was a drop of blood upon it; you know we both noticed it, and, darling, I saw in a minute with my little pocket lens that the blood was there *before* the letter: the ink was written straight across it. He must have sat down to write that letter immediately after the bullet went right through him. I tell you this for fear you should think I know more than I do know. But I know very little. That's absolutely all I've guessed about it.'

Hetty shuddered.

'Well, Jocelyn,' she said firmly, with an effort to be calm, 'the reason he wrote that letter after he was shot was just because of this—oh, darling, I can hardly speak it out, even to you; but surely she wouldn't lie to me with her dying breath, would she, Jocelyn?—it was just because of this—I must tell you—' dropping her voice to a terrified whisper—'Maimie shot him.'

Jocelyn held her hand tenderly in his and soothed it with his own a dozen times over before he ventured cautiously to answer. Then he muttered very low, twice or thrice together:

'Maimie shot him! Maimie shot him! I . . . I thought she had shot him. I'm not surprised at it. But, Hetty, how on earth did this wretched woman come to know of it?'

'She saw the blood on the floor, Jocelyn—pools of blood lying in the laboratory; and she saw Maimie sitting in the room after the—the accident; and she heard her say, "Sydney, Sydney, I did it on purpose!"'

'But why did the woman never tell anyone about it before, Hetty?'

'Jocelyn! she loved her! She loved Maimie!—she loved her devotedly! Everybody loves Maimie, somehow, Jocelyn. I love her myself. In spite of all, I love her dearly.'

'I know you do, Hetty; I know you do, my darling. . . .

We all love her. Everybody loves her. . . . Hetty, Hetty, whatever comes, we must never tell anybody of this against Maimie.'

'But, Jocelyn, Jocelyn! it'll be so wicked—so very wicked to keep it secret.'

'Hetty, if we breathe a word of it ever to anybody, I'll tell you what they'll do to poor Maimie. They'll take Maimie, our dear little tender-hearted delicate Maimie, that smooth-skinned, beautiful, laughing little woman, and they'll carry her off by main force to goal, and put her alone in a gloomy cell the live-long night in the dark and solitude to cry her lovely big brown eyes out; and they'll hale her up next day before a stern-faced judge, a hard lawyer with no compassion in his cruel nature, and twelve stolid, hard-hearted, Philistine jurymen; and they'll try her for her life; and they'll torture her by questioning the witnesses before her; and they'll make great speeches to show she did it; and they'll find her guilty; and they'll hang her, Hetty—think of that, my darling; they'll actually hang her—hang Maimie, our pretty, gentle, womanly little Maimie. Oh, Hetty, Hetty, Hetty, my sweetheart—you dear, compassionate, good little angel—too good for me, too good for me, my darling; too good for anybody—you won't help these horrid creatures to hang little Maimie, will you, darling?'

Even in the public anteroom there, with the hospital servants passing to and fro before the open door, as Jocelyn whispered so in his delicate voice persuasively and dramatically into her listening ear, Hetty, utterly unstrung by the day's terror, burst at once into tears, flung herself wildly in her weakness upon her husband's shoulder, and sobbed out aloud in heart-broken agony:

'Never, Jocelyn; never, never, never, never! For Maimie's sake, I'll never tell it; I'll keep it secret for ever, for ever and ever.'

Jocelyn patted her head affectionately with his soft white fingers.

'That's right!' he whispered. 'That's right, Hetty! That's a brave woman; a good little woman! Stick to that, darling, and no harm can possibly ever come of it.

And, Hetty dearest, for Maimie's sake, you must never even tell Maimie.'

Hetty started back again one momont in a fresh access of horror.

'Jocelyn,' she cried, 'oh, darling Jocelyn, I *must* tell her! I *must* talk to her of it. I *must* beg her to pray—to pray for forgiveness.'

The painter smiled a quiet smile of superior compassion for her feminine weakness.

'If you do,' he said, 'it'll all come out at last, sooner or later, and all will be up in the end with poor Maimie. No, no, Hetty, that'll never do. You must lock up the secret in your own heart and keep it inviolate for ever from everybody. If two women talk a thing over together, they might as well proclaim it openly upon the very housetops. But this is not the place to talk it over with me even. Let us go home and arrange about the future quietly there, Hetty.'

'If I keep it locked up in my own breast and never tell even Maimie, Jocelyn, it'll burn me out as it burnt out that poor woman that's lying dead on her bed upstairs this minute, and I shall never know another happy hour as long as I live in this world, darling.'

Jocelyn took her reluctant hand tenderly in his and led her gently, without another word, out into the vestibule. Her eyes were very red with crying, and her whole look was shattered and broken down.

'Will you call a hansom for me, please, porter?' Jocelyn said to the big man at the door in his authoritative manner. 'My wife has come to see a dying patient, and has been much agitated by seeing her burst a blood-vessel here before her. Bear up a minute longer, Hetty darling; bear up a minute longer. I'd better get you home at once safely. You'll be much easier when we're once at home again, and can talk it over quietly at our leisure with one another!'

As Jocelyn helped his wife into the cab at the steps of the hospital, a slinking, shadowy, dark-bearded figure, lounging in the gloom about the pillars of the portico, followed them down with a stealthy tread and shut the doors of the hansom behind them. Jocelyn glanced at him curiously

for a moment. He seemed to recognize the features somehow: likely enough, some model he had seen somewhere or other at a brother-artist's. The fellow had exactly the cut of a model—the model who poses for your Italian brigand; and yet he had a broken-down gentleman air about him too, as of a man who had once been somebody distinguished. And these things passing rapidly through his preoccupied mind without much consideration, Jocelyn Cipriani leaned back at his ease, trembling, in the hansom, and thought no more in his own soul about the shadowy, shabby, dark-bearded stranger.

But Sydney Chevenix, scanning closely those two familiar faces in that single moment—he had tracked them steadfastly thither with his usual dogged detective-like persistance—said to himself in his heart as they faded out of sight, 'Yes, yes; the worst has come. There can be no more doubt about it. They have been to see Hannah Gowland. She came to die here at the hospital last Wednesday. Hannah Gowland must have known it all, and kept it till to-day for love of Maimie. Now Hannah's dying or dead, and Hetty's been to see her and heard the truth of it. I could see she had learnt it all by her deathly face and haggard eyelids! This is a terrible new danger, indeed. What can I do now to make Maimie happy?—to make Maimie happy! Maimie happy! Maimie—Maimie—Maimie—Maimie! I must do something to make Maimie happy.'

CHAPTER XL.

HETTY ACTS.

All that night, Hetty lay awake on her bed, tearless, with her face buried deep in her pillow, and her heart within her burning fiercely, in the first fresh horror of that unspeakable secret. She hardly uttered a word to Jocelyn, and Jocelyn hardly uttered a word to her; as they lay there silent side by side, both were too full of their own thoughts and their own fears for the terrible future, but each knew the other was awake, and each felt in his own heart what it was the other was thinking of so intently.

Early next morning, Hetty rose; she couldn't lie in bed any longer, tossing, with that awful weight of care pressing upon her breast; and she dressed herself hastily and carelessly in whatever came uppermost. Jocelyn rose, too, without a word, and put on his working suit of velvet; and they went downstairs together as of one accord, and out instinctively into the glaring studio. There Jocelyn made two cups of coffee in his little etna, and silently, with a kindly husband-like gesture, made Hetty swallow hers as well as she was able, though it burned her parched throat as if it were molten lead, so dry and feverish was she with pent-up horror.

'Well,' Jocelyn said at last, as he stood, palette in hand, before his Academy canvas and pretended to be busying himself with a few unimportant minor alterations, 'why have you got up so very early this morning, Hetty?'

Hetty looked at him and burst into tears. It was an immense relief, after the long strain of the night-watches, that one good cry, and Jocelyn didn't attempt in any way to prevent it. On the contrary, he flung down his palette hastily, laid her head on his shoulder with gentle solicitude, and whispered at her ear in his softest and most soothing tones:

'Cry away, darling; cry away, little one. It'll do you good. There's nothing like it. When a woman can't cry, it's all the worse for her. I knew you were longing to cry all night, and couldn't find a tear to shed in all your eyes, pet. And I—I, too, could cry bitterly, Hetty. I could cry, darling, as well as you can.'

And as he spoke, the tears rose dimly to his own eyes, and trickled down, one after another unreproved, upon his brown cheek and pointed moustaches.

Presently, Hetty left off crying a little, and walked towards the hall as if to get down her cloak and bonnet.

'Where are you going to?' Jocelyn asked, following her closely.

'I'm going to Maimie's,' Hetty answered with unwonted firmness. 'It's not the least use talking to me about it, now, Jocelyn. I can't help it. I've made my mind up.

I must go. I can't wait any longer without speaking to her.'

Jocelyn saw at once she was fully determined, and didn't for a moment attempt to thwart her or to argue with her in any way. He knew by experience that if Hetty was quite sure she was doing right, she would do it boldly, and brave the consequences, whatever he might think or wish or say to her.

'Very well, darling,' he replied, slowly and remorsefully. 'I'm sorry for it—very sorry; it's a terribly dangerous card for you to play. The less said about such matters the better. We oughtn't even to talk it over by ourselves together. There's only one really safe and certain course in all such cases—absolute silence. But if you've quite made up your mind you must speak to Maimie, why, of course you must, and there's an end of it; though I'm very, very sorry for it.'

Hetty looked at him inquiringly from her red eyes.

'Jocelyn,' she said, 'isn't it terrible—incredible—horrible—inconceivable—to think that our dear little beautiful innocent Maimie is a murderess—a murderess?'

'Hush, hush, darling!' Jocelyn cried eagerly, clapping his warning hand, with a look of wild alarm, upon her tell-tale lips. 'You mustn't whisper it even to your husband in the dead of night, sweet. You know, Hetty dearest, walls have ears; to be overheard is death to Maimie!'

'I can't believe it,' Hetty moaned; 'I can't think it; I can't imagine it. And yet I don't know what else to think. I can't rest till I've gone and asked Maimie herself for an explanation.'

'Hetty,' Jocelyn said slowly, after a minute's silence, 'will you just wait awhile till after breakfast? Will you just consent to put it off a little longer, for appearance sake, merely to keep things quiet? If you go now, the servants at Maimie's will know all about it—at least, they'll know there's something dreadful the matter to bring you there with such red eyes so early in the morning; and, of course, there'll have to be a regular scene; and Maimie 'll cry and get hysterical; and Adrian 'll say we're going to ruin them; and unless you put it off till ten at least, there'll be

a mystery—an obvious mystery—which is the worst thing possible under the circumstances. If there's really anything at all in the cook's story—which is more than doubtful—what we ought above all things to try to avoid is to excite attention at all in any way.'

Hetty paused and hesitated for a second. A little respite was in itself a relief; she dreaded the explanation more than the suspense even. Then she said in a tone of half-consent: 'As you like, Jocelyn. Perhaps, as you say, for Maimie's sake, we ought at least to wait till after breakfast.'

They waited in the studio till breakfast was ready, and then walked, with as much appearance of carelessness as they could well command, into the adjoining dining-room. The breakfast was a mere dumb show, of course—food would have choked them; and as soon as the maid had left the room, Jocelyn solemnly rose and wrapped half the bacon and chicken cutlets on their plates in a piece of newspaper, to hide the fact that they had eaten nothing, but merely tasted their cup of coffee. Then he put a little gravy on the two forks, and dabbled about the knives a bit in the dish to make them look as if they had been eaten with.

After this show of breakfast, they started off together to go to Maimie's.

In the rooms nearly opposite, a dark-bearded eager stranger stood watching them closely with a powerful opera-glass, from a safe distance inside, behind the curtains; and as they turned out into the street the dark-bearded stranger went down to the door, and walked noiselessly along the pavement just behind them, keeping always at fifty or a hundred yards' distance. The scent was lying close now. It was clear those two were bent on mischief for poor little Maimie.

They walked straight towards Wilmington Place. Sydney Chevenix following quietly behind, and, looking unobtrusively into shop-windows, with a casual glance as they turned the corners, let himself in to No. 35, just as they were going up the stairs indoors at Maimie's opposite.

Adrian was out, but Maimie came into the drawing-room gaily to receive them—a neat little figure, beautiful as ever,

in a pretty morning gown and linen collar, so fresh and fair and innocent and charming, in her careless household dress, that Hetty felt her belief in Hannah Gowland's story utterly shaken, and said to herself in a burst of remorse, 'How wicked of me ever to have even thought it possible! Surely, after all, she can never be a murderess! Our dear little simple childish-hearted Maimie!'

'Why, you darling Hetty,' Maimie cried with girlish tenderness and anxiety, as she looked at the pale and red-eyed face before her, 'what on earth can you have been making yourself so miserable about? You dear old thing'—and she flung her arms affectionately around her—'you must come at once to me to be comforted. Whatever can Jocelyn have been saying or doing to you to make you so unhappy, I wonder?'

Hetty's heart fluttered violently as she spoke, with a newborn hope. Surely, surely, Hannah Gowland must have been raving mad or wild with delirium! That sweet little Maimie could never, never, never have fired the fatal pistol! It was impossible, incredible, utterly inconceivable! And yet—and yet even Jocelyn seemed to think it might possibly have been so. But now that she stood face to face at last with darling Maimie, after all her tossing night of feverish horror, she hadn't the heart even to tell that sweet, bright, affectionate little woman that she had ever harboured such a terrible thought in her heart about her.

She drew the plump little figure over to the low, long sofa by the bow window, and seated her down upon it gently beside her with a remorseful tenderness. Then she laid her head timidly on Maimie's breast, and sobbed aloud in bitter grief as if her heart would break within her.

Maimie, patting her cheek and stroking her hair silently for a time, began at last to grow alarmed.

'Why, what is it, Hetty?' she cried after some minutes, in a little crisis of rising terror. 'You and Jocelyn haven't fallen out with one another, have you?—you who used always to be so happy together! Don't tell me, darling, that you've quarrelled with one another. I always thought you a sort of model irreproachable wife and husband.'

Hetty could hardly falter out the faintly spoken words:

'No, no, Maimie darling, it isn't that, or anything like it. It's something about *you*—about YOU, my darling! Something so terrible that we've heard about you.'

Maimie rose, as if pierced by her words, and stood looking blankly and fearfully at her, fixed to the ground by some invisible power, in speechless agony. For the first time since that awful day when Sydney Chevenix (as she firmly believed) was safely buried out of sight and mind in Woking Cemetery, the dread and horror of her deadly crime and its possible punishment rose once more in all its vivid and hideous details visibly before her. She clasped her beautiful round neck instinctively with her two white hands, in half-unconscious pantomime, as she gasped out convulsively, 'About *me*, Hetty? About ME, did you say, darling? Oh no, Hetty, don't say it, don't say it! Tell me it isn't true, Hetty, my Hetty! Tell me they haven't been telling you anything terrible against me!'

With a fearful shudder Hetty noticed that strange instinctive gesture of Maimie's hands around her statuesque neck, and drew the terrified little woman down to her again in an agony of fear, laying her head tenderly upon her own shoulder, in spite of her horror. She couldn't exactly say why, but she knew now that Maimie had really done it: there was something in her sudden access of terror that said as plainly as words could say it, 'I have an awful secret, and I think you have discovered it.' And yet she loved her! In spite of all, she still loved her! In her own heart, Hetty Cipriani thought hastily to herself, in an undertone of feeling, that she ought that moment to be repelling that wicked woman instinctively from her side with awe and loathing — a murderess! a murderess!— instead of which she was drawing her tenderly down to her own soft bosom, and caressing her as usual with a half-motherly, half-sisterly caress of affectionate soothing. Hetty couldn't understand it in the least herself; but one thought only was uppermost now in her soft-hearted little nature—how to spare Maimie pain; how to tell her the truth with the least possible cost of anguish and remorse to her; how to let her know as quickly and as delicately and as kindly as possible that there was no danger, that she and

Jocelyn alone shared the terrible secret, that that suggestive and horribly instinctive gesture was all unnecessary, all uncalled for in any way. Every idea of righteous wrath or of shrinking had faded away from her, now that she actually stood face to face in Maimie's enthralling and fascinating presence—every idea even of an appeal to conscience and to the need for repentance and forgiveness from Heaven: one absorbing notion alone remained—Maimie was in trouble, and Maimie must be comforted.

'My darling,' she cried, pressing hard the pale and terrified girl upon her tender bosom, 'Maimie, my sweetheart, my darling, my precious one, don't be afraid: there's nothing to be afraid of; nobody shall hurt you. I know it all—Jocelyn and I—the one person beside who ever knew has just told us; but not a soul else on earth knows it, and not a soul else on earth shall ever know it, though we die for it ourselves, Jocelyn and I, my darling, my precious one. You needn't be frightened, Maimie; you needn't be frightened'—soothing the sobbing girl's head with her hands: 'the only other person who ever knew is dead and gone, darling, dead and gone, Maimie; and she whispered it into my ear, my pet, as she lay there pale and white upon her death-bed, and nobody but ourselves will ever know it.'

Maimie, in return, sobbed and nestled into Hetty's bosom, and took the small, delicate hand childishly in her own smooth, plump, round, soft ones. For a while she sobbed away her terror inarticulately; then at last, slowly reassured by Hetty's gentle and regular pressure, she lifted her head with a wondering look of infantile fear, and asked between her sobs:

'Who is dead? Who knew about it? Who told you that I ever shot him, Hetty?'

A cold thrill and a deadly shiver went through Hetty's frame as she heard that beautiful, gentle, dainty little creature utter so easily those naïf and awful words of self-implied accusation.

'Hush, darling, hush,' she cried, with an involuntary shudder, as she drew back half aghast for a moment from the confessing murderess. 'For Heaven's sake, don't say a

single word about it! Don't whisper it! Don't talk of it! Don't dream of it, even! Lock it up for ever in your own breast, Maimie, my Maimie—or tell it only to God and to me, pet.'

Maimie's sobs burst forth afresh more wildly than ever.

'Then you don't love me any longer,' she cried out passionately, flinging herself away from Hetty with a wild gesture of despair, and burying her face in the soft sofa-cushion like a spoiled baby. 'You don't love me any longer. You hate me—you hate me! Nobody 'll love me, and everybody 'll hate me, just for a single moment's forgetfulness—a little moment—a tiny moment. I didn't mean it—I never meant it. It was an accident, an accident. I swear to you, Hetty darling, it was almost an accident. I hardly knew for a single second what it was I was really doing.'

'The woman said,' Hetty answered quietly, seized, she knew not why, with a sudden avenging spirit, 'that she heard you cry out, "I meant to do it. I knew I was doing it. Sydney, Sydney, I did it intentionally. I wanted to shoot you!"'

At the unexpected sound of those long-forgotten but well-remembered words—delivered in a low clear voice by Hetty, just as Hannah Gowland had repeated them to her the night before, in Maimie's own very tone and manner—Maimie's heart gave a single breathless bound, and then stood still for a long space appalled within her. She did not cry; she did not sob; she did not faint; she did not lift up her voice and pour out her soul in bitter agony: she simply sat there, mute and spell-bound, incapable of speech or thought or action, a living statue of unspeakable terror. Her poor little brain whirled around feverishly, and she knew nothing, and thought of nothing, save that she was stunned, crushed, destroyed, and annihilated by that terrible disclosure.

Hetty gazed at her once more in penitence and sorrow. Whatever had she done to poor Maimie? Who was she herself that she should venture so harshly and cruelly to judge a fellow-creature? What did she know at all about the whole grave matter, save only the uncertain half-

wandering evidence of dying, conscience-stricken Hannah Gowland? Had her words struck Maimie dumb and senseless for ever, she wondered? So white, so pale, so motionless, so marble-like she looked, as she sat there bolt upright on the drawing-room sofa, horror-smitten and numbed with speechless agony at that hideous reminder of her one great tragedy.

'Maimie, Maimie, speak to me, Maimie,' Hetty cried imploringly, leaning forward towards her with her bloodless hands clasped downward as she spoke, and appealing eyes turned straining upon her.

'Hetty, Hetty, you will kill me, Hetty,' Maimie answered almost without moving her lips, rigid and stiff as a lifeless block of cold white marble.

Hetty gave a little involuntary cry of remorse and horror.

'Maimie,' she whispered, 'I love you—I love you. You never did it. I know you never did it. I can't believe you did it. The woman must have lied to me. She was mad; she was wandering. You can never, never, never, never have . . . shot Sydney!' At the last words her voice, low enough before, sank at once in her fear and horror to an almost inaudible and inarticulate murmur.

All this while, Jocelyn Cipriani had stood still beside them, hat in hand, without speaking a word or moving a muscle, watching the two women in their varying emotions and vivid attitudes as only a painter could possibly have watched them at so terrible a moment. In spite of himself, almost, he could not help noticing and marking the waves and throbs that followed one another at first across Maimie's full white throat and neck, or the rigid fixity of her dilated pupils, when Hetty quoted at last those convincing, damning, relentless words of Hannah Gowland's. But now that the first burst of passion in both the women had gradually worn itself out a little, he trusted himself, with a man's timid diffidence in such a final crisis, to intervene for a moment's diversion of the current of emotion.

'Maimie,' he whispered, coming forward suddenly and touching her on the shoulder with his firm hand, so as to wake her up rudely as it were from the momentary trance into which she had fallen, 'Maimie, you mustn't let

yourself get so pale and white and cold, little woman. You must rouse yourself bravely and hear the whole truth of it from me or from Hetty. There's less harm done by far than you imagine. The woman who told Hetty all this was Hannah Gowland. Hannah Gowland has told nobody else on earth but Hetty. Hannah Gowland kept it locked up in her own heart till her dying minute. And Hannah Gowland died safely yesterday evening at a London hospital'—he purposely avoided saying which hospital, lest he should needlessly awaken the chord of terror once more in Maimie's bosom. 'Not a soul on earth now knows anything at all about it, except only me and Hetty. And we are as safe and as silent as the grave—as safe and as silent as the grave itself, Maimie.'

At the first touch of his strong firm hand Maimie gave a sudden little tremulous start, and a cry as if of returning consciousness, and then sat listening intently to his words, with far-off eyes, like one who listens to some strange ghost-story.

'Hannah Gowland?' she repeated slowly, as soon as he had finished—'Hannah Gowland?—Hannah Gowland? Ah, yes, I remember something about poor Hannah. She was our cook, wasn't she, at Beaumont Terrace? I never liked her; but she seemed to be fond of me. I'm sure I hadn't the faintest notion in the world that Hannah Gowland knew anything at all any way about it.'

'She was in the kitchen,' Jocelyn went on quietly and distinctly, in a low tone, but as calmly as though he were describing to her any ordinary matter of everyday occurrence—'she was in the kitchen on that last day when you and Sydney were talking and laughing together in the laboratory; and presently she heard, or thought she heard, you say something, just as Hetty repeated it now to you. The laboratory-door opened soon after, and Hannah looked out through the crack of the kitchen door, and saw Sydney slipping out from the laboratory, and a pool of blood lying on the floor there. . . . Listen to me carefully, and don't interrupt me! . . . Without asking for an explanation or waiting for you to give one, or inquiring into the state of Sydney's mind, Hannah Gowland jumped at once, woman-

like, at the absurd conclusion that you must have deliberately shot Sydney. That conclusion is on the face of it, put side by side with Sydney's letter, obviously incompatible with the facts as we know them. Sydney shot himself, and himself acknowledged it: we have it on the evidence of his own hand, given at the moment when he was just about to die, and therefore not likely to commit an act of gross deception; and Sydney was a truthful and upright man, whose evidence we ought to have no hesitation in unreservedly accepting. If Hannah Gowland wasn't the unconscious victim of some singular hallucination, you must have been in the laboratory there with Sydney at the moment he shot himself. . . . No, no, don't interrupt me. . . . For some good and sufficient reason of your own, which it would be impertinent and foolish of us to inquire into too closely, you didn't care, it seems, to let us know that you were present at the exact moment when Sydney fired the fatal pistol. I can easily appreciate the possible reasons for so natural a reluctance on your part, Maimie. You were agitated and terrified: you had just lost a husband who idolized you, and whom you in return loved dearly: you didn't wish to have to give evidence on so painful a subject before a coroner's jury, and to have your actions questioned and criticized by twelve unsympathetic thick-headed Englishmen. Perhaps there had been—as there often must be between husband and wife—some slight tiff or misunderstanding between you and Sydney. Perhaps'—and he looked her hard in the eyes with persuasive suggestion—'perhaps in a momentary fit of vexation or anger so aroused—possibly even under the influence of a passing pang of remorse or of jealousy—Sydney took up one of the little pistols that were always lying about loose in the laboratory, and foolishly or thoughtlessly fired it off against his own breast to frighten you or annoy you. That the action was unpremeditated I have reason to know; that it was repented of afterwards I know too; and I will tell you why, Maimie. The letter in which Sydney stated that he was going to shoot himself—a letter whose direct and explicit terms are worth a thousand times more than all Hannah Gowland's half-hearsay evidence—that letter

was written after, not before, the moment when he fired the fatal shot, I feel certain, Maimie.'

Maimie gave a sudden involuntary start of surprise and acquiescence.

'How on earth do you come to know that, Jocelyn?' she asked incredulously.

'I know it,' Jocelyn answered in the same quiet, business-like tone as ever, 'by a little bit of circumstantial evidence which no painter could ever overlook, and which no thick-headed British juryman would ever dream of taking any notice of.' And then he told her in very brief terms how he had discovered that the spot of blood on Sydney's last dying letter lay not above but beneath the handwriting which it ought to have splashed as Sydney shot himself. 'Now, Maimie,' Jocelyn Cipriani went on, looking straight into her face with eyes full of warning and pregnant suggestion—he dared not speak to her more plainly before Hetty—'I don't want to ask you how it came about that you and Sydney happened to quarrel, or what it was that made him shoot himself, or why he wrote that letter afterwards—obviously to screen you from the evident chance of this false accusation—or why you didn't wish to tell us all from the very first, that you were in the laboratory with poor Sydney when he fired the shot that made you a widow; none of these things matter to us or to anyone else the least in any way. We know you couldn't have wished or meant to hurt Sydney. We know that Sydney really shot himself. We know that even if you had fired the fatal pistol it must have been by some terrible, unaccountable accident. We require no excuse, no explanation. All we beg of you is simply this: say nothing even to Hetty and me about it all. I can trust you. Hetty can trust you. Show us in turn that you can trust us, and say nothing on earth to us about it.'

Hetty looked up timidly at her husband in wondering amazement. How clearly Jocelyn could set everything straight in a single moment! He was quite right: of course he was right: no doubt on earth of it. Yes, yes, there had been merely a momentary quarrel, a family disagreement—even she and Jocelyn disagreed sometimes—and

Sydney, who was perhaps, at times, an impulsive, hasty, quick-tempered creature (though she herself had never thought him so), must have taken up the pistol angrily in Maimie's presence, and then and there incontinently shot himself in the despair or jealousy of a passing moment; and afterwards, seeing what a terrible suspicion must hang over Maimie unless he confessed it, had just had strength to sit down and write that noble beautiful letter exculpating her from all blame, and then, no doubt, had bid her fly—fly for her life to her own room before they were discovered there together. Oh, yes, she saw it all quite clearly now, and Jocelyn—Jocelyn had read it all right immediately, as he always did at once, with everything. In her own heart Hetty hated herself terribly for having ever harboured such wicked, base, unworthy thoughts about dear Maimie. As to Hannah Gowland, she must have seized too eagerly upon the half-truth, misled by Maimie's slipping from the laboratory, and putting two and two together, on the wrong scent, she must have manufactured from her own excited fancy those damning words she imagined she had heard Maimie utter that evening in the kitchen. To Hetty's mind Jocelyn's clever and clear-seeing intellect had at once exonerated poor innocent little Maimie from all shadow of blame in that terrible incident.

But as to poor little Maimie herself, sitting there with her truthful eyes drinking in amazed Jocelyn's cunningly suggested line of possible defence, she did not in the least appreciate the necessity for so much concealment or so clever an apology. To her Jocelyn seemed simply to be going altogether upon a mistaken line, and she was anxious at once to set him right, without at all understanding the forensic skill of his carefully constructed hypothesis for her strange conduct.

'Oh no, Jocelyn,' she answered quite naturally, calmed by his judicial tone, as a woman of her temperament is always calmed by a man's cool and collected demeanour in any great emergency. 'It wasn't at all like that, really. I'll tell you just how it happened, if you'll only listen to me. Sydney and I——'

'Don't!' Jocelyn cried, holding up two fingers warningly

before him, in solemn deprecation of her imprudent confidences. 'Never say a single word to anybody about it. Never trust it even to me or to Hetty. Never whisper it below your breath to the walls or the curtains. Bury it deep, whatever it may be, in your own soul. Say not a breath or a syllable of it even to any living human creature.'

'Yes, do, dear,' Hetty cried with brave insistance, for the first time in her whole life venturing to differ openly in opinion from her clever husband. 'Tell me all about it. Tell me exactly how it all happened. It'll ease your conscience, darling. It will make you happier. Tell me all about it, darling Maimie, conceal nothing. Tell it all to me. I am strong enough to bear it. I will not shrink from you, whatever dreadful, horrible thing you may have to tell me, darling Maimie.'

'It was all an accident, Hetty,' Maimie cried passionately, rising and facing her, full in front of the great bow window —'it was all an accident—almost an accident; a moment's impulse—a mere passing fancy—an irrational emotion. I was standing up beside poor dear Sydney, out in the laboratory at Beaumont Terrace, and he was making me practise at a target with his new explosive—his noiseless explosive, that Adrian said I must never say a word about for the world to anybody—I hope Adrian won't think I've done wrong now in telling you—and that afternoon I had met Adrian accidentally on Primrose Hill, and talked to him so nicely, and I thought to myself how much I loved him, and that if anything were ever to happen to dear Sydney——'

Hetty's face grew cramped with horror, and she gave a little start of unspeakable astonishment at that strange confession; but Maimie hardly even seemed to notice it, and went on without even so much as suspecting the depth of the feelings her story aroused in the mind of her astonished and horrified listener.

'And then, you see, I happened accidentally to point the pistol over towards Sydney; and I said to myself, "If only that pistol were to go off now, by any chance, Sydney would fall down dead before me, and Adrian and I might be

happy together!" And at that moment—I don't know how—I can't imagine what happened to the trigger—but it seemed to snap of itself somehow; and the pistol went off noiselessly, you know—that was the way, of course, with poor dear Sydney's new explosive—and in a minute Sydney was shot, and there was I, crying and sobbing and wringing my hands, and falling on my knees, and clasping his feet, and trying to recover poor dear Sydney!'

'Well?' Hetty said, in a stony voice, recoiling from her now, in spite of her promise, with instinctive awe.

'Well,' Maimie continued, acting it all out unconsciously in pantomime before them as she spoke, after her usual vivid excited fashion, 'poor dear Sydney cried out to me aloud, "Why, Maimie, Maimie, what on earth have you done to me?" And I said to him, rushing up to him and clasping his knees, "Sydney, Sydney, my darling, my darling, I have killed you! I have killed you." And he said to me, "Yes, my darling, you have killed me, you have killed me; and now if I don't recover they'll go and hang you for it, my darling Maimie. Quick, quick, give me a pen and a sheet of paper." And I gave them to him as quick as lightning. And then he sat down and wrote at once the letter you've heard about, saying, you know, that he'd really shot himself, and that I had nothing at all to do with it in any way. I've always thought, do you know, Hetty, that that was such a very noble thing of poor dear Sydney.'

Before Hetty, stunned and bewildered at this sudden and to her utterly unexpected revelation of the real, genuine, inmost Maimie, had time to recover from her first wild astonishment sufficiently to frame some vague inarticulate attempt at an answer, the door opened without the slightest sign or warning, and Adrian Pym, fresh from his morning's turn in Regent's Park, entered carelessly in his tweed walking suit, and gazed with a hasty look of astonished recognition at the pale and haggard faces before him. At a single glance he took the whole scene in perfectly, and knew what the errand was they had come upon.'

'Then it's all up, is it,' he cried, 'Cipriani? There's nothing left for it, isn't there, then, but the Roman remedy? You understand me!'

And as he spoke, standing behind the two pale and red-eyed women, he drew his hand significantly across his throat, and threw his head back limp upon his shoulders with a terrible look of utter despondency.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE TIME ARRIVES.

MEANWHILE, at No. 35 opposite, Sydney Chevenix, opera-glass in hand as usual, had been following, from behind the curtain, with painfully vague and gloomy forebodings, this dramatic episode seen dimly across the road and through the big bow-window of the house in front of him.

On the table by his side lay a short note from Vera Trotsky. It contained only a few words:

'MY FRIEND,

'Save yourself. To-night the police will call at your rooms in company with Trapmann, and if they find you there, on his indication, they will arrest you as Stanislas Benyowski, for the murder of Komissaroff. If you do not wish all to come out at once, you must immediately go elsewhere.

'Yours,

'VERA.'

At any other time the note would have roused Sydney to a pitch of terror for Maimie's safety; but now it was far more than outbalanced by his fear of what the episode he saw before his eyes might forebode of evil for poor little Maimie.

He knew, in some faint indefinite manner, what errand Jocelyn and Hetty were bound on; and he could guess pretty well by their movements, their gestures, their looks, and their attitudes, what sort of things they were each in turn saying to Maimie. Months of careful practice in watching from a distance the actions of others had taught him, in fact, rapidly to interpret with marvellous precision the very words and ideas and emotions that the people he looked at were expressing to one another.

As they first entered the long front drawing-room, he could see Maimie—darling Maimie—how his heart always bounded

at the very sight of her!—opening the door in her pretty flowered morning gown, and the simple little linen collar around her beautiful full white throat. He could see her start in sudden surprise at the first glimpse of Hetty's pale face and black-ringed eyes; and then the two women sat down together timidly on the sofa, and Hetty laid her head, sobbing, upon Maimie's bosom, and looked up straight into Maimie's face, as if she somehow expected Maimie to comfort her, instead of herself comforting Maimie. Perhaps, after all, he might be mistaken. It might possibly be on some other errand that they two had come that morning to Maimie's.

By-and-by, however, he saw quite distinctly that Maimie was alarmed at something they had said to her. She jumped up from her seat with clasped hands, as if smitten by a sudden access of terror, and stood like a statue right in front of Hetty, now grasping her beautiful neck with her two white hands, and looking like a terrible living presentment of utter helplessness and wild despondency.

At that dreadful sight Sydney's heart stood still within him.

'Maimie! Maimie! my darling Maimie!' he cried to himself, in audible language. 'Hetty is terrifying her! Hetty is threatening her! Hetty is telling her she has killed her husband! Ah, how dare she! How can she! How dare she do it! The cruel, wicked, heartless creature, to frighten my Maimie! my darling! my angel! Look—look at her now—look there at Maimie, clasping her sweet neck with her two dear hands!—the darling! the darling! Oh, what can Hetty ever be saying to her? It's too terrible—too terrible altogether. I can't stand it; I can't stand it any longer. I must break silence at last. I must break silence, for Maimie's sake: for Maimie's sake I must come out and reveal myself! If all is up, I must come out and save her.'

His heart stood still, as he looked, within his breast, and great cold beads of chilly sweat gathered slowly and clammily upon his bloodless forehead.

Presently Hetty advanced again across the room to Maimie, and folded her tenderly in both her arms. It was Maimie now who sobbed upon Hetty's consoling shoulder, and Hetty

who seemed to be soothing and calming her with womanly solicitude.

'Then Hetty at least is not against us,' Sydney Chevenix thought bitterly to himself with a sigh of relief. 'Hetty at least doesn't misunderstand my darling Maimie. Hetty knows it was the merest accident—the impulse of a second—a slight misunderstanding—a girl's mad fancy. I was a cruel fool ever to think I could deserve such a prize among women as my Maimie; and I have had to pay dearly for my own folly. I have had to pay for it, and I don't complain of it.'

He wiped the big drops hastily from his brow, and stood once more intently watching them.

What can Hetty have said to her now? What blow can Hetty have struck so suddenly at poor, tiny, soft little innocent Maimie? Look at her!—look at her! Terrified! thunderstuck! smitten visibly to the eye with horror, and awe, and remorse, and misery! Oh, how could he stand it, how could he endure it, how could he face it any longer?

'Maimie! my Maimie!' he muttered to himself, writhing in his agony, 'they will kill you! they will kill you! How dare they! how dare they! My precious one! my angel! my darling! my Maimie!'

Next, as he watched, it was Jocelyn in turn who stood forward a little, and began to speak to them in measured language. Jocelyn was a man: a man can always understand these matters so much better than a mere woman. A man knows how to make due allowance for girlish impetuousness; a man feels for a pretty woman, and takes her little fads and fancies, as they ought to be taken, in a wide-minded spirit. Jocelyn was speaking calmly and dispassionately. Jocelyn was temperately quieting their womanly fears, and suggesting a plausible natural explanation. No; more than that even, Jocelyn was clearly altogether exculpating Maimie. How coolly and soberly and judicially he spoke; how cleverly he humoured them; how Hetty seemed to listen, and weigh, and be convinced by his cogent, clear, and forcible logic! Thank Heaven, all might yet be well. Jocelyn had broken the force of the adverse case and summed up distinctly and favourably for Maimie.

Then Maimie herself once more arose and faced them

openly, as if at bay before them. Standing as she did full in front of the big bow window, Sydney could see distinctly from where he sat every movement of her arms, every wave of feeling that passed across her face, every quiver of her lips, her eyelids, her throat, her delicate, dainty, round white fingers. It was terrible thus to follow from a distance that mute tragic pantomime, to watch and spell out the signs of emotion as they succeeded one another rapidly on Maimie's speaking features, decipher slowly the very words she was uttering, almost, from the motion of her lips and the quivering of her tremulous sensitive nostrils. Sydney, who knew her every muscle so well, could tell by her face exactly what each sentence was meant for, and he leaned forward and watched with breathless attention, all absorbed for the hour in the one fatal and final question—would Maimie foolishly answer and criminate herself?

She stood there, speaking low but excitedly, right in front of him, going in action through the whole story exactly as it happened—an unconscious actress, with supreme art—the art of unconsciousness. She was telling them now how she came into the laboratory on that awful evening, and how Sydney in mere wantonness made her practise at the target with his new explosive. And now she was explaining hastily how Sydney happened to turn his back upon her, and how she pointed the pistol at him, half as a joke, in pure unthinking childish playfulness. There, there, her hand dropped. The pistol had exploded, and she was running up and clasping her arms wildly around him, and begging him to live, and confessing it all, and calling him her own dear husband, her darling Sydney, and telling him how she had come to fire at him. Was she confessing it all, he wondered to himself, in the very worst and most self-condemnatory possible fashion—making too much of it—misrepresenting herself, pretending in her remorse that she really did it deliberately and intentionally? He turned his gaze for a moment to Hetty. Yes, yes, she was. No doubt of it!—no doubt of it! It was all up. The secret was out. He read at once in Hetty's face amazement—horror—distress—loathing. There was only one thing possible now to save her; only one thing to save her from the name of murderess. He must come forth

once for all and reveal himself and then—then be silent for ever.

Thank God, thank God, she wasn't a murderess! They were all judging her harshly, untruthfully. He was living still: he stood there, the actual Sydney, visibly before them. There was yet one chance to stifle the lie, to choke the reproach, to kill the calumny. He was able still to make Maimie happy—Maimie, Maimie, Maimie, Maimie! Thank God, he lived, and Maimie would be happy!

He flung down the opera-glasses idly on the ground. The glass broke. Well, what did it matter? He had no further use for glasses now—for them or for anything! Maimie, Maimie, Maimie, Maimie! Thank Heaven, he had lived to make Maimie happy! The perspiration dropped, dropped, dropped silently in great round drops from his clammy forehead upon the floor of the parlour. He brushed it away hastily with his sleeve, and hurried off with a burning soul into the little back bedroom.

A dressing-case lay upon the table by the window. Sydney Chevenix opened it quick with trembling fingers, and took from it, very tenderly and lovingly, a pair of disused and rusty razors. He ran his finger lightly along the edge. It was sharp enough still to cut a man's throat with. He took out a pair of tiny nail-scissors. They were Maimie's present, they and all the rest of the leather dressing-case—an unlucky present, Maimie had said, a pair of scissors, and she made him give her a penny in return, in pretended payment, superstitious little soul! to avert the supposed unpropitious omen. He smiled a little smile to himself as he thought now of that foolish episode of their early married life together. Never mind, lucky or unlucky, the scissors would help him now at least to save Maimie. They had come in useful after many days. He had saved the dressing-case from the wreck of his house as it seemed to some purpose. It had lain on the dressing-table at the old home on the day of the sale, and he had ventured to go in and buy it quietly, for Maimie had sold it—sold it with the rest—and had thought nothing of selling it either. And so happy was he at the chance of possessing it that he never even cared to blame Maimie for her heartless action in letting any casual stranger buy her present to her dead husband, as she must have thought it.

CHAPTER XLII.

RESURRECTION.

ADRIAN PYM stood moodily with his two arms folded hard in front of him, bolt upright, and pale as death, the very image of a strong man utterly baffled and reduced by plain facts there is no gainsaying to the uttermost depths of blank despair.

'It's all up,' he repeated once more, in a hard cold voice, as Jocelyn told him, in few words and short, the whole story of their visit to the hospital last evening; 'it's all up, and there's no good our trying to conceal it any longer. When four people together know a secret, and two of them women, at that, into the bargain, it must all come out sooner or later; there's no denying it. As long as only Maimie and I knew anything of it, there was just some hope still of keeping it quiet. Maimie's not like other women, thank Heaven. She knows no remorse, or shadow of turning, because she's a child, and forgets altogether everything that's happened, as long as nobody talks to her about it. And I know none, or very little, because I'm a man, and can live superior to it—can press it down deep in my own silent bosom. And we two had quite sufficient reasons of our own for never blabbing about it in any way to anybody. But when four people together know a secret, and two of them women, at that, into the bargain, it can't help leaking out sooner or later, as sure as gospel—and a great deal surer.'

Jocelyn walked up and down the drawing-room, pulling his beard gloomily and silently. At last he spoke, in the same calm and quiet musical voice as always:

'The less said about this thing even now the better,' he murmured slowly. 'The two women in particular should never talk it over with one another, no matter where they may be, or how strong the temptation. Walls have ears, and we ourselves are wrong this morning to have spoken so much about it here to one another. The prudent man doesn't even whisper to the reeds by the river-side the secret of King Midas's ass's ears. But there's no need after all, if one comes to face it, for such profound despair as you imagine,

Adrian. You and I spoke of this business once before together, and once only, and all these months we have since kept silence. We may still keep silence for years and years the same as ever.'

Adrian Pym turned round upon him fiercely with withering scorn.

'You fool!' he cried, hissing through his teeth, and forgetting, in his utter despondency, the decent restraints of conventional language. 'You and I are man and man, and we two might keep a secret together for ever and ever. But do you think that woman there'—and he pointed his forefinger contemptuously at Hetty—'will keep her tongue still for a whole lifetime, when she knows she's the confidante of a murder! a murder! and might let it all out by merely wagging it. Yes, yes, I *will* speak, Cipriani! I will speak if I choose to! They call it a MURDER!—the fools! the idiots!'

At that moment, the door of the drawing-room opened suddenly, without a knock, without a pause, without a sign or warning of any kind, and Sydney Chevenix, alive and erect, stood as of old in the flesh before them.

The black beard and moustache and whiskers were gone, and the dark dye had been washed out carefully with a detergent acid from the slight eyebrows. Clear-cut and close-shaven, no longer muffled and screened and hidden by that luxuriant growth of concealing hair, Sydney Chevenix's delicate features stood unmistakably revealed before all eyes in their old manly handsomeness and vigour. The brown complexion had not all completely disappeared from his cheeks, and his face looked thin and haggard and careworn yet, compared with the face they had known in the old happy days at Beaumont Terrace; but still it was Sydney, undeniably Sydney, older, and paler, and browner, and more harassed-looking than of yore, yet still Sydney, the re-risen Sydney, alive and not dead, himself and not another, whole and not murdered. Even Adrian Pym recognised him at once from his old photographs. For a moment nobody started, or moved, or uttered a word: they only sat or stood

and gazed at him in blank surprise and wonder and amazement.

At last Maimie found breath the first for a long loud cry—

'Sydney! Sydney! Sydney! Sydney!'

If Sydney had only yielded that moment to his own natural inmost impulse, he would have sprung forward instinctively, then and there, at the sound of that thrilling tremulous voice, and folded Maimie wildly in his arms in one long embrace, Adrian or no Adrian, overcome by the force of his pent-up passion. But with a mighty effort he sternly repressed himself. She was Adrian's now, by his own act, by his own will, by his own design, by his own contrivance; he had handed her over himself to his rival, he had put them into that false position of his own accord, and he must abide by it for ever, come what might of it. So he drew himself up, cold and irresponsive, and only answered in a hard dry voice, husky with concealed emotion:

'It is I, Maimie—Sydney Chevenix.'

Slowly Adrian Pym came forward from the group, and stood confronting him, incredulous and critical. He had seen Sydney Chevenix but once before, as he believed, dead and mangled at the Regent's Park Hospital. But that was a phantom, a double, a substitute: for the first time in his life he beheld him now in very truth, the man whose place and wife he had usurped; he beheld him now, returned to life, standing like a visitor from another world, erect and silent, gazing straight before him at the awe-struck group, and waiting long for them to ask for an explanation.

Adrian was the first rudely to break the death-like silence.

'We thought you were dead, Sydney Chevenix,' he said simply.

Sydney bowed his head in solemn acquiescence.

'So I was, Adrian Pym,' he answered back in hard dry tones—'legally dead, dead and buried. You have inherited my house, my land, my position, my money. You have inherited my wife; you have inherited everything. I do not grudge them to you. I have planned it myself. You shall lose none of them—not even HER. Do not fear it. I had but one wish—to make Maimie happy.'

'For Heaven's sake explain, Sydney,' Jocelyn Cipriani

cried, coming forward eagerly towards the pale slim figure, and laying his firm hand upon Sydney's shoulder, as if to convince himself by actual touch of his real identity and material existence. 'Who was it that was dead and buried in your place at Regent's Park Hospital? How have you come to life again so suddenly? Where have you been spirited away meanwhile? And why have you concealed the truth so long from us?'

'For Maimie's sake,' Sydney Chevenix answered slowly and solemnly. 'And for Maimie's sake I have come to life again this morning on purpose to tell you. I saw from the window of the house opposite what was taking place between you to-day. I knew that Hannah Gowland must have blurted out everything. I knew that Maimie must be living in fear of her life for the consequences of the murder she had never committed. I knew that nothing else could possibly have relieved her from her terror and suspense except my coming here bodily this morning. So I came, I came at last, in spite of everything. I chose the lesser of two evils. Better Maimie should know I am still living, than suffer any longer the anguish and torture of supposing she had really and truly killed me.'

'Sit down,' Jocelyn said, setting him a chair, 'and explain to us all the mystery of your disappearance.'

'I will *not* sit down,' Sydney answered quietly but firmly. 'I have not come here to stop and terrify Maimie. I have not come to make her bright little life any more unhappy. I have come for a minute only—for a short explanation—to set things all right again between everyone of you, and then to disappear once more to where I came from, for ever and ever. I will *not* sit down. I will stand and explain to you.'

Awed by his voice—his strong, calm voice—they answered nothing. Indeed, there was a terrible hollow ring in it, as of a message that sounded from beyond the grave; and they listened to it breathlessly in solemn silence, as though it were in truth the dead and buried Sydney who had risen from his coffin to unravel the mystery for them, and to make Maimie happy. As for Sydney, he did not dare to trust himself to look towards Maimie, or towards Adrian: he addressed all

his explanation direct to Jocelyn Cipriani, and to him only.

'The man who died, and was burnt at the hospital that night,' he began calmly, with just an imperceptible tinge of deadly tremor in his faltering voice, 'was not me, but Stanislas Benyowski. After the accident—the accident in the laboratory—when the pistol went off quite unexpectedly in Maimie's hands (she didn't mean to do it: at worst it was an accident)—after the pistol went off, Cipriani, I wrote that letter, the letter you heard read at the inquest, just to explain matters; and then I staggered out alone into the road, and drove in a cab to the Regent's Park Hospital. There you yourself came and saw me. Shortly after I arrived, as I lay half insensible, Stanislas Benyowski was brought in, shot also through the body, and they laid him in the bed next to the one that I was occupying. I have learned since, by inquiry among the people with whom I now associate, that Benyowski was shot that evening by his Communist friends on a real or mistaken charge of having betrayed the secrets of their cause to the Russian Government.'

He paused a second to catch his breath, and stole a passing glance sideways at Maimie. She sat on the sofa, looking timidly towards him, but with her head half leaning for support upon Adrian Pym's shoulder. He had done it himself: he could not complain. If she was happy, it was more than enough for him.

'In the course of the evening,' he went on drily, in the same hard, cold, mechanical tone as before, barely interrupted every now and then by an occasional faint tremor in the trilled consonants, 'Benyowski died, in the bed beside me. It occurred to me then, that if I could only change places with Benyowski's corpse, it would make matters very much easier for Adrian and Maimie. I felt as if I were certainly going to recover; and I was sure that after what had already happened—for reasons which Maimie will at once appreciate, but which it is needless for me to explain to you in full, Cipriani—my recovery would probably cause an immense deal of unnecessary distress and inconvenience to poor Maimie. So almost before I knew what I was doing, I got out of bed—at the time, I believe, more or less de-

lirious—and dragged across Benyowski's corpse into the bed which bore my name at the bed-head. In doing so, I accidentally upset, so far as I can make out, a paraffin lamp that stood upon the table; and the lamp set fire to that ward of the hospital. The flames rose up at once and caught the bedclothes around Benyowski's body, and so disfigured it that you and others quite honestly believed you recognized it as mine when called in to identify it on the morning of the inquest. So the body that lies buried at Woking Cemetery is not really Sydney Chevenix's, but Stanislas Benyowski's.'

That was all—that bald, concise, cold narrative of the facts, without one passing hint of the terrible emotions and volcanic throes of internal feelings by which they had been accompanied in his own bosom. Sydney Chevenix suppressed all that: he was not there to magnify his own conduct, or to pose as a great romantic hero, but merely to explain to Maimie's satisfaction his sudden disappearance and continued existence. Yet to himself, who knew what the bare facts really meant of underlying heroic struggle and prolonged endurance, the simple recital was in itself an inexpressibly painful one, and he wiped the cold sweat hastily from his brow with feverish fingers before he went on to tell them, in a trembling voice, the rest of his wonderful, terrible story.

'After that,' he continued once more, 'I remained at the hospital until my wound was cured, and then I went out again into the world, taking the name of Stanislas Benyowski. I let my beard grow while I was convalescent, and as soon as I got out I dyed it black, and cut my hair short, and altered my complexion, and wore clothes made by a foreign tailor, so that nobody who knew me could easily recognize me. Then I came and took the rooms opposite Adrian's house here; and I have spent my time ever since in trying to watch over Maimie's happiness.'

Adrian gave an involuntary start.

'Then you were the man with the black beard,' he cried in astonishment, 'at number thirty-five!'

Sydney nodded in silent acquiescence.

'I was,' he answered, looking not towards Adrian Pym, but still only towards Jocelyn Cipriani. 'And from the

room opposite I watched you all over here this morning, and saw there was mischief brewing for Maimie.'

'But your money—your house—your property—everything?' Jocelyn cried, bewildered. 'What on earth can you have done, yourself, for a living? Why on earth did you give them up without a word for somebody else's benefit?'

Sydney smiled a bitterly contemptuous smile, and waved his hand aside gently as he answered with curling lips:

'It was all Maimie's. I gave it to Maimie. I had no wish but to make Maimie happy. For myself, have I not a pair of hands to work with? Am I more helpless to earn my own livelihood than—than any common journeyman mechanic?'

'Chevenix,' Jocelyn said in a low voice, drawing back abashed, and gazing at him in solemn surprise and astonishment, 'no words of mine can ever express the depth of the admiration and wonder and awe I feel at such grand heroic conduct. I will not attempt it. It is not for such as me. We have no common measure. I am ashamed to speak to you.'

There was a long pause, and Sydney was just beginning to think he had said enough, and might go his way at last with safety, when Maimie suddenly and unexpectedly broke the silence, in her childish voice, with a curious question.

'Then, after all, Sydney,' she said plaintively, 'Adrian and I are not properly married to one another?'

For the first time since their one short greeting, Sydney ventured to turn again and look straight at her.

'No . . . . Maimie . . . .' he answered slowly, as their four eyes met. 'Adrian and you are not properly married. But the fault is mine—the fault is mine . . . . Maimie.'

'Oh, Sydney!' Maimie cried half querulously, 'you ought never to have put us in such a false position. You ought to have let us know from the very first that you were living, and that we couldn't be rightly married to one another.'

Jocelyn gazed at her in blank amazement, and the colour rose at once into his cheek, in a natural blush, called forth sympathetically by the sight of so much human insensibility; but Sydney only shook his head sadly, and answered with a sigh:

'I did it for the best, Maimie; I did it for the best. I tried to act in the way that I thought would make you happiest. If I acted wrong, I am very sorry for it. But you must forgive me. I have suffered a great deal—a very great deal—on your account, Maimie.'

That was the only time he permitted himself to allude for a single moment to all that he had endured for Maimie's sake; and he was sorry for it the second he had uttered it.

There was another slight pause, and then Sydney looked round again.

'It will not be for long, Maimie,' he went on quietly. 'I shall not trouble you now much longer. You and Adrian may be happy together. I don't doubt you will soon be really married. I have told you everything I have got to tell you. I think you all now understand the whole story. Nothing but fear for Maimie's safety would ever have wrung it from me, Cipriani. Had it not been for that, it would have gone down with me untold into the grave. . . . It is a mistake to come back again from death to life. . . . I can go now. You none of you want me any longer? Good-bye, Cipriani! Good-bye, Hetty. Good-bye . . . Adrian. Good-bye . . . Maimie.'

He turned to go, with a sad smile and a terrible quivering of his under lip, which Jocelyn Cipriani noticed only too visibly. But, as he turned, Maimie jumped up in sudden surprise from the drawing-room sofa, and stood confronting him with a scarlet face and a strange look of wounded pride upon her baby features.

'Sydney! Sydney!' she cried reproachfully, 'you're not going away for ever and ever without even so much as once kissing me!'

At that strange appeal, so ill-timed, so unexpected, Sydney hesitated and trembled for a second. He stood like a man drawn fiercely on by some irresistible passion, yet striving hard to master himself and to quell his feelings by strong self-control. Every limb and muscle quivered violently, and his face twitched with a deadly twitching as he gazed straight back into Maimie's eyes with all the suppressed fire of his earnest nature.

'Just this once,' he cried at last, springing forward eagerly

and clasping her to his bosom. 'Just this once, since you ask it, for the last, last time. Maimie, my Maimie—my heart's love—my only angel—my sweetest—my idol! I love you! I love you! I have always loved you! For your sake I could forego everything. For your sake I shall see you no longer.' And he printed a single, long, hard kiss on the centre of her burning, snow-white forehead.

The next moment he was gone; and there was a profound silence.

It was broken first by Maimie's voice, speaking more lightly and naturally by far than she had yet spoken that whole morning.

'Well,' she said, drawing a deep breath, 'it's a great comfort to find out anyhow that after all, as it turns out, Adrian, it wasn't a murder: I didn't really and truly kill him.'

CHAPTER XLIII.

WHITHER?

They sat for a minute or two longer without exchanging a word with one another: and then Adrian Pym turned inquiringly to Jocelyn, and half whispered, in a voice full of shame and penitence:

'Oughtn't we to follow him, and see what he's going to do, Cipriani? I don't know whether he's in a fit state to be left alone. He said something about his not troubling us now much longer—that Maimie and I might be happy together—that it was for the last time—that nobody wanted him at all in future. Do you think he meant——'

Jocelyn Cipriani interrupted his unfinished sentence quick as lightning, with a hasty gesture of deprecation.

'Say no more, Adrian,' he put in sternly. 'The less said, the sooner mended. Let us not inquire too closely what he means next. It's not for you and me, I tell you, Pym, to follow such a man as Sydney Chevenix. He knows best himself what he wishes to do, and how he can most fitly accomplish his purpose. Let him go his own wild way untrammelled. His life is wrecked. We know who has

wrecked it. Why should you try to keep the miserable hulk of it any longer afloat up here in misery? Better it should sink alone and unpitied in the black abyss, than hamper it now in its blank wretchedness with our petty little unasked-for solicitudes.'

Hetty sprang up with a cry of terror from the sofa, where she had hitherto sat silent, her hands clasped hard, and her eyes brimming with the tears that would not fall, from the moment when Sydney, pale and haggard, first entered the drawing-room on his errand of mercy; and clinging to her husband's arm in an agony of despair, she cried out aloud:

'Jocelyn, Jocelyn, you don't think, after all, he's going to kill himself for Maimie, do you?'

Jocelyn turned to her with a wondering look of intense compassion.

'Why, Hetty, Hetty, my darling Hetty,' he murmured in her ear, with infinite pitying surprise and tenderness, 'are you, too, as blind and as deaf as she is? Do you think there is anything else left possible? Did you never observe his voice, his eye, his mouth, his quivering lips, his twitching muscles? What sort of life would you call him back to? Why should you wish to prolong any further his terrible agony of a purposeless sacrifice?'

'I understand,' Hetty said, growing paler and paler, and letting her voice sink to an almost inaudible whisper. 'He sees at last he has thrown away his whole life for a woman who was utterly and inexpressibly unworthy of it.'

'He sees it,' Jocelyn echoed. 'He sees it. He sees it. And he is ready even so to sacrifice everything on earth for her—if he had anything left still to sacrifice.'

Hetty paused, and looked for a moment wonderingly at Maimie, who sat whispering low with Adrian upon the sofa. Then she touched her husband's arm gently with her hand.

'Let us go,' she said. 'Let us leave them together. We are not wanted here. They must have much now to say to one another.'

Maimie rose and came forward, with tears in her eyes, but still comparatively calm and quiet.

'How kind of you, Hetty,' she said quite simply. 'Yes, Adrian and I have many things to talk over by ourselves,

dear, this morning. It has been a very terrible day indeed for us. It's so like you to think of leaving us alone now.'

And she bent forward, as affectionately as usual, and held up her mouth with pursed-up lips for Hetty to kiss it.

Hetty drew back her own pale lips in horror and wonderment.

'Not now, Maimie,' she cried, recoiling inwardly against that feminine caress; 'not now—not now. Some other time, perhaps. I don't know; I hardly realize it all as yet: but certainly not to-day; I cannot, I cannot. . . . Good-bye Maimie. Good-bye. . . . Maimie.'

And she held her hand out coldly and formally.

Maimie took it, held it for a moment with a doubtful pressure, and then letting it drop like a stone from her fingers, sat down once more despondently upon the sofa, and burst into a flood of childish tears.

They went down the stairs, Jocelyn and Hetty, and out of the door, and down along the streets towards home in silence, till they had almost reached their own staircase. Then Hetty spoke at last in trembling accents.

'Jocelyn,' she said, 'I can't understand how such a man as Sydney Chevenix could ever have so completely sacrificed everything for such a woman as Maimie Llewellyn! If she had been somebody fully worthy of him, now—some generous, noble, broad-souled creature—some girl who would have appreciated so great devotion!—but Maimie! Maimie!'

Jocelyn halted on the step a second and held his unlighted cigarette poised between his fingers as he answered slowly:

'That only shows how bad a psychologist you really are, my precious Hetty. It is for just such a woman as that, darling, that a good man, a true man, a great man, a noble-minded man, is always ready to sacrifice everything. If you look through all history and all biography, you'll find invariably it is for the lightest women, the emptiest women, the shallowest women, the unworthiest women, that men have always in all time done and dared the utterly unspeakable. Where a single man would barely die for love of you, Hetty, a thousand men would willingly die, I dare be bound, for love of Maimie. He did it all for Maimie's sake; and for Maimie's sake he will still do what yet remains for him.'

Hetty shuddered.

'Oh, Jocelyn,' she cried again, 'you don't mean to say you think he is really going to kill himself?'

Jocelyn shrugged his shoulders.

'Che sara, sara,' he answered gloomily. 'The world works itself out its own predestined way, and we can do but little to help it or retard it. Let it work itself out what way it will, it can bring nothing but misery and regret to Sydney Chevenix. Better far he should lie and sleep at peace on Thames bottom, than live to know, day after day, that Maimie, for whom he has wrecked his life, cares really less than nothing for him.'

CHAPTER XLIV.

MAIMIE SAVED.

From Wilmington Crescent, Sydney Chevenix wandered on by himself, careless and aimless, off in the direction of Pimlico and Chelsea. He knew nothing, and cared nothing, of where his feet were spontaneously leading him: he simply walked straight onward, straight onward, and ever straight onward, through throngs and crowds of passing people, solitary, unknown, unnoticed, unnoticing. He walked as lonely through those populous streets as if he had been wandering all alone by himself in the very middle of desolate Sahara He stood face to face with his own thoughts only; face to face, too, with the real, the genuine, the revealed Maimie.

He had known it all from the very beginning; known it and admitted it; known it, and shrunk from even acknowledging it; known how little he was to her, who to him was absolutely everything; known it, and yet pretended not to know it; worshipped at the shrine of the Maimie who was not, and who never had been; cherished tenderly his disillusioned ideal; nursed the flickering embers of his dead love; given way to the fixed idea which had taken possession of him, body and soul; absorbed himself wholly in Maimie's happiness. And now he had done all that was possible for him, and his *rôle* in life was cut away clear from under him.

To live a single day longer was to risk the discovery of his personation of Benyowski. He had only one duty left on earth, to remove himself—that useless obstacle—out of Maimie's path, and for Maimie's sake out of Adrian's. It was easy enough, indeed, to do: he had no hesitation or cowardice about it: but he wished he could have carried down to the grave with him a better last impression of darling Maimie—Maimie! Maimie! Maimie! Maimie! He was less than nothing, then, after all, to Maimie.

If only she had not asked him to kiss her!

'Sydney! Sydney! You're not going away for ever and ever, without even so much as once kissing me!'

How little she knew the greatness of his sacrifice, the struggle he had gone through before he could resign her, the pangs with which he had watched so tenderly over her happiness with Adrian! And yet, even to himself, Sydney Chevenix would not pretend he had done anything in the least heroic; would not confess that Maimie could do wrong in anything, in anything, in anything.

'My angel!' he said to himself; 'my darling! my beloved one! What does it matter to me whether she loves me, or whether she doesn't! Enough for me if I can make Maimie happy. I will make her happy!—I will make her happy! She shall keep her Adrian! She shall be properly married to him. No log of an obstacle shall stand in their way. The log shall float down stream, instead, this evening, with this evening's ebb tide. For Maimie's sake!—for Maimie's sake! How like a tune it rings always in my ears—Maimie! Maimie! Maimie! Maimie!'

He walked till he came to Battersea Bridge, which he crossed half-unconsciously, turning in at last to the Park on the other side, and seating himself, in the drizzling rain which had begun to fall, on one of the benches.

There he sat, in a kind of lethargy, the livelong day, without tasting food, or moving from the bench, till evening began to close in upon the river.

Then he wandered out once more into the neighbouring streets, and felt dimly conscious for the first time that he was growing cold and wet and hungry. So he strolled off quietly to a baker's shop, and bought a penny roll, which he ate as

he walked down the streets again, in the direction of the river.

Presently, he passed a stationer's window, where he saw there was a little branch post-office. He went in, throwing away in the street the remainder of his roll, and bought a bundle of halfpenny postcards. He took one, and asked for a pen, which the stationer handed him. On the back of the card he wrote a few words in a firm hand—no trembling now—and addressed it on the face to Mrs. Adrian Pym, Wilmington Crescent. The words he wrote were few but concise:

'By the time this card reaches you, Maimie, the one obstacle to your happiness will be removed; and I shall be floating dead, I hope and pray, upon the middle of the river. If my body is found, you may have it buried as Stanislas Benyowski's. Mademoiselle Vera Trotsky will identify it. No need now to rake up the past again. I have always loved you. I love you still.

'Yours for ever and ever,

'SYDNEY.'

He read it over, and then, suddenly recollecting himself, bought a packet of envelopes, with one of which to cover it.

'How foolish of me to forget!' he said to himself angrily. 'The servants would see it.'

He put it inside one of the envelopes, and again directed it, and dropped it carefully into the letter-box.

Then he wrote a second card in French to Vera Trotsky.

'DEAR FRIEND,

'Inquire to-night late for my body, and identify it at once as Stanislas Benyowski's. I am going to drown myself. I kiss your hand.

'SYDNEY CHEVENIX.'

A ragged child was standing by the door as he went outside, munching with great satisfaction the bit of sodden crust that Sydney had flung so carelessly into the gutter.

'Poor miserable little fragment of humanity,' he said, patting the ragged child tenderly upon her clotted curls,

'what a pity so much good material should go to waste. You pick up the fragments that remain, it seems, in strict accordance with the scriptural injunction. Let me see what money I have left in my pocket. Ten—twelve—fourteen and sixpence. Better you should have it than a Thames lighterman. Take it, little one; take it; take it. Don't be afraid of me; it isn't stolen. What a pity so much good material should go to waste in the gutter or—the river. *Qualis artifex pereo!*—a good chemist is going to be wasted.'

So, muttering ever to himself, 'Maimie, Maimie!' he walked along to the wharves by the Embankment, and found a nice, quiet, dark spot by a corner, where a man could let himself in wholly unperceived, without much fuss or noise or trouble. Glancing around him nervously, he took off his coat and boots, and stepped gently into the cold, black water. The electric lights on the Embankment opposite glared and flickered, but nobody saw him. Then he swam off, heading down stream with the ebb tide, in the murky darkness.

'I shall swim till I'm tired,' he said to himself with careless glee, 'unless a Thames steamer runs me down first, and then I shall just go quietly under. Drowning isn't so bad after all as living . . . Good-bye, Maimie . . . Maimie, Maimie, Maimie, Maimie!'

Next morning, very very early, Jocelyn Cipriani went round to the newsmonger's to buy the first of the penny papers. He opened it with a certain vague foreboding of what he should see, and glanced rapidly down all the columns for the subject he wanted. Presently, the name of 'Stanislas Benyowski' met his eye, near the bottom of a column. He looked in haste at the little paragraph. Yes, yes, it was there.

'Mysterious suicide . . . well-known Polish Communist refugee . . . no marks of violence . . . name on linen, "Stanislas Benyowski" . . . picked up at half-past eleven by a Rotherhithe boatman . . . long been wanted by the police for a murder at Guildford . . . tracked, at last by a clue given through a Nihilist refugee . . . identified by

Mademoiselle Vera Trotsky . . . no doubt drowned himself in desperation.'

Jocelyn Cipriani sighed a sigh of pity and relief, folded the paper up carefully, and went round with it in haste to Wilmington Crescent.

'You will break it gently to Maimie, Adrian,' he said, handing him the paragraph. 'Her nerves must already be terribly shattered by what took place here yesterday morning.'

'It's no use breaking it,' Adrian answered with a deep breath. 'She has had a post-card from Sydney to warn her beforehand.'

As he spoke, Maimie came out of her bedroom, pale as a sheet, and haggard with crying, and took the paper from her husband's hands. Jocelyn pointed silently to the fatal paragraph, and looked on in mute attention as she read it through, standing close beside him.

Maimie laid down the paper on the table with tears in her eyes.

'Poor Sydney,' she said meditatively, 'poor, dear, good, unselfish Sydney! He did it for my sake, you see, Jocelyn! Do you know, Adrian, I do really believe that poor dear Sydney was after all extremely fond of me.'

THE END.

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